

A fashionable poet and the darling of the upper set in Rome, Ovid was banished by Augustus in the year 9 of our era for reasons that have remained obscure. Relegated to Tomis, a little garrison town on the Black Sea, in the land of the Getae, Ovid continued for eight years to sue vainly for pardon, till he died, still in exile, in the year 17.

Horia's novel is the apochryphal journal of Ovid at Tomis. There, at the end of the world, he tells us tenderly of his last loves, and of the events great and small that he witnesses, and all that goes on at these wild frontiers of the Roman Empire. But above all he enables us to witness the evolution of his own soul, and this is what is so moving.

Thus we are shown the frivolous and erotic poet undergoing transformation in exile, beginning from the moment when he discovers that 'one can die before being dead for good'. The idea of a lonely death in this strange and hostile land grows unbearable. But where shall he turn for consolation? Not to the old gods, whom he has already shown, in the *Metamorphoses*, do not exist. So little by little Ovid the sceptic feels his way to another truth, which soon becomes The Truth. Through the Getic sages, the priests of the people who live around him, through the revelations of Theodore the Greek physician, he finds in himself the irresistible expectation of a new God 'who will restore to mankind the freshness of a new beginning'.

GOD WAS BORN IN EXILE

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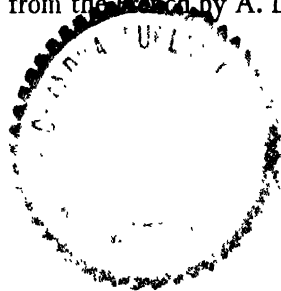
OVID'S MEMOIRS AT TOMIS



A NOVEL BY
VINTILA HORIA

With a Preface by Daniel-Rops
of the Académie Française

Translated from the French by A. Lytton Sells



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To My Wife



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PREFACE

DISCOVERY OF A NOVELIST

BY DANIEL-ROPS
of the Académie Française

It is always a joy to recognize the hallmark of talent, the appearance of a genuine writer. One opens the typescript, taken at hazard from the pile that has accumulated on the desk, when suddenly something strikes and holds the attention, a something commanding but indefinable which forces one to go on reading, to learn what is going to happen to the characters, to push on to the last page. Yes, there is quality here, a mysterious but genuine gift, an amalgam of inspiration and style, of thought and form. Such discoveries bring joy.

Greater still perhaps is the joy when this is one of the writers—and they are more numerous than is generally supposed—who in various parts of the world continue to use French as a privileged means of expression. This language today is challenged by many competitors; yet it is good to think that from South America to Japan, as in Paris itself, writers who do not belong to the French nation are none the less witnesses to the 'universality of the French language' of which Rivarol once spoke with such eloquence. The example of a Julien Green shows that such a one can prove master of a tongue not that of his native land. Should not Vintila Horia be counted as one of these?

He was born in Rumania where his father was an agricultural expert. From a nearly blind old woman who knew Baudelaire and Rimbaud, Anatole France and Rémy de Gourmont by heart, he learned how to express himself in a French that was idiomatic and based on good models. Sent as press attaché to Rome in 1940 but recalled soon after by the régime of the Iron Guard, he was appointed to Vienna in 1942 but interned before long by the Germans. Refusing in 1945 to return to his

own country, which was now subject to another foreign power, he began to undergo the tragic experience which so many of our contemporaries have known and which one of Horia's own fellow-countrymen was to describe in *The Twenty-Fifth Hour*. In Italy, where however he made friends with Papini, at Buenos Aires where he earned his living as a junior bank-clerk while his wife did exhausting manual work, and lastly in Spain, where as an hotel employee and concurrently a reporter and paragraph writer, life was for a time equally overwhelming, he knew the unending, pitiless horrors of exile. And yet this experience was to yield the purest and deepest part of his inspiration.

The theme of exile is therefore at the heart of his work. There are few themes with which the men of our time are more familiar: exile, with its suffering, its heartbreak and its tragic nostalgia; but exile with its terrible powers of purification. 'I chose exile,' said Nietzsche, 'in order to be able to speak the truth.' Is not the exile, the man who has lost everything, predestined perhaps to judge the world of men who are in a secure position, to declare the hypocrisy and injustice of that world? Is he not also prepared to undergo the great spiritual experiences? It was not yesterday that the Gospel taught us that the traveller upon earth has more chances of finding God than he who dwells in ease and comfort.

The year 1958 brought an encounter, a meeting in the spirit. The two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Ovid was being celebrated. Vintila Horia took up the poet's works which he had more or less forgotten since he passed his baccalaureate. They appeared now as a revelation. Ovid too had been an exile—and an exile in Rumania where he had died. Between the Roman poet of the first century and the Rumanian writer of the twentieth a link was forged, a kind of supernatural bond, born of a mysterious affinity. In reading Ovidius Naso's *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, the exile in Madrid recognized himself. Very soon the idea of identifying himself so to speak with his model, to tell of his own experience, took possession of him. And so this great book, *God was born in exile*, came into being.

Ovid, as we know, was the fashionable poet, the darling of the upper set in Rome when, in the year 9 of our era, Augustus banished him for reasons that have remained obscure. Some writers have supposed that he belonged to a Pythagorean sect which the all-powerful emperor distrusted. More probably—and this is the view accepted by Vintila Horia—Augustus, who wished to bring Roman society back to the practice of stricter morals (though he himself had not practised what he preached), was irritated by the flagrant immorality of the poet's works; and as the guilty love-affair of the emperor's granddaughter Julia, a great reader of Ovid, had caused a scandal, Augustus vented his fury on the poet.

Relegated to Tomis, a little Roman garrison-town by the Black Sea, in the country of the Getae, Ovid continued for eight years to sue for pardon or at least for permission to reside in a civilized land. Neither Augustus nor Tiberius was moved by his prayers and he died, still in exile, in the year 17.

Vintila Horia's novel is the apocryphal journal of Ovid at Tomis. Reading it we picture the unhappy exile lost on the confines of the world. 'It is only tears that relieve me,' he groans. 'They burst from my eyes more readily than water from the snow in spring, when I think of Rome and my house, of the places that were dear to me, of all that remains of my being in that country I have lost.' In this imaginary journal he tells of his last loves and of the events great and small that he witnesses and the siege of the town by the famished Dacians, the unprecedented adventure of the Roman soldiers who desert from the army in order to settle in Dacia, and the invasion of the Sarmatians. But above all he enables us to witness the evolution of his soul, and this is what is so moving.

Ovid as a happy man had written frivolous poems. 'Let others regret the simplicity of old-time manners,' he had cried in the *Ars amatoria*, 'and let me rejoice at having come into the world in this pleasant age of ours!' It is this light-minded and erotic poet whom Vintila Horia shows us undergoing a transformation when in exile, beginning from the moment when he discovers that 'one can die before being dead for good and all'. The idea of death, a lonely death in this strange and

hostile land, gradually grows unbearable. Where shall he turn for consolation? To the gods of the old Roman religion? But he himself had shown clearly enough, in the *Metamorphoses*, that they did not exist. 'He trembles in face of the void which that book has opened within him.'

And thus little by little Ovid, the trifling poet, the sceptic, feels his way to another truth which soon becomes *the* Truth. 'These times we live in, times of folly and of hope, are the times of the expectation of God.' But who will bring the word of peace to suffering mortals? Ovid divines that one day 'men will find this word like a strange flower beside a long, long road'. But who will deliver the message? The quest for an answer becomes more and more urgent for the exile. Around him live these Getae, a very religious people who, as he guesses, believe in one God. One God? This at first provokes him to irony. 'If, as I think, the heavens are empty, this God must be very small and all alone amid an unbearable silence and solitude.' And he adds: 'This one God must be like me, in this respect at least.' But what is he? Can he be the 'Zamolxis' of whom the Getae tell him? Ovid seeks long and gropingly, noting in his journal what seem like fragments of a gospel conveyed by some popular tradition.

And then comes the definite advance. When he encounters the Getic sages, priests of the unknown religion, he discovers his need of this new God 'who will restore to mankind the freshness of a new beginning'. He feels within himself the irresistible expectation 'of this new God, this new people, this new sun'. A priest reveals to him the truth about his personal drama. Suppose that his sufferings and exile had been willed by a divine power which had resolved to compel him to rise above himself? Suppose that this new God were a man like himself, a man of sorrows and doomed to die? Ovid has now only to meet the Greek physician Theodore for everything to be made clear to him. For what Theodore reveals is that all he hopes for is true, that his expectation has been fulfilled, that one of the children of men has come upon earth to take on himself all their sorrows and all their hopes. At Bethlehem in the land of Judah 'God has been born in exile'.

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*Caesar in hoc potuit iuris
habere nihil*

FIRST YEAR



I shut my eyes in order to live, and also to kill. Therein I am the stronger, for *he* closes his eyes only to sleep and sleep brings him no consolation. For him night is full of the dead who haunt him and the cruelties he has committed. I know that like all the great ones of the earth he does not care for rest. Rest leaves him in solitude, with only conscience and remorse, and regret for having always acted as a man of power, that is as a man terrified by his power. One morning five years ago I met him in the temple at a moment when he was hardly awake. His eyes were red and swollen with fatigue and he lacked the courage to look us in the face for fear we might detect in his eyes the names or features of those who had tormented his dreams. People worship him as a god, but no one loves him; for he is the author of Peace in general and has established the greatest empire of all time, but he is also the author of Fear in particular, other men's fear and his own fear.

My roof is shaken by the snow-blizzard. I can hear the sea moaning far away and know that during the night its waves will turn into long ghostly ribs of ice. People will walk on it tomorrow, with the fishes below them, and some neighbour stronger than I will have to clear a path up to my door, through the deep snow, so that I can go out. I have never heard such a howling, together with the pattering of frozen snow on the walls. Beyond the high-pitched howls that flood over me like rain, the moaning of the sea is like the very voice of the night, as if time itself had a voice and were clamouring at one spot on the whole earth: this spot. My house is almost backed against the town walls and when the wind dies away I can hear the

howling of wolves beyond the walls. They are famished. One was killed in the street this afternoon. Maddened with hunger the creature had rushed into the city, sprung upon the first living thing it had met, an old woman returning from market, and had killed her in an instant. I made for the spot when I heard the people shouting and was in time to see the wolf lying, transfixed by a spear, on its victim amid the blood-stained snow. I immediately thought of *her*, and could not help wishing she would meet with a like fate, which is unfortunately impossible as wolves never venture into Rome. But a lion might escape one night from the wild beasts' den, make its way into the gardens of the emperor's palace and do what no man has yet had the courage to do.

I shut my eyes and kill. How present are these scenes to my imagination, clearer and more vivid even than the memory of this afternoon! I shut my eyes and live. I am the poet, *he* is only the emperor.

* * *

The queer thing is that amid all my despair I cannot get used to the idea of change. I have been here for some ten days. I left Rome three months ago, but *I am in Rome* and it seems to me that it would be enough to prolong a thought or an image a little further, for me to be transported back and become part again of my habitual habitat and way of life. And yet, while writing these words, at this very moment, I am overcome with a frightful doubt. Rome is far away at the other end of the world, and no thought can enable me to return. Rome is like the past, something lived through and lost for ever, detached from myself like a strange thing which can be recaptured in the mind or imagination but is no longer within my physical grasp. My past has a name, but what good is it? I weep. I am afraid and I am cold and there are no gods. This truth comes upon me when my tears have ceased to flow, congealed like the frozen waves along the shore. This truth has always been present, but I never had the time or strength of mind to realize it. My life and my verses were opposed to it and I lived on an illusion, an illusion of which I sang to give pleasure to others.

But if I dared reread the *Metamorphoses*, how I should tremble in face of the void which that book has opened within me, at the very time when I spoke of the omnipotent gods! Their cruelty bespeaks their non-existence. They are the reflection of our fears and of what we dare not do without remorse. How could men possibly have survived in face of the hatred and capricious behaviour of gods so like ourselves? How could Prometheus have been possible? I am Prometheus and I exist. *Tristia* will be the title of my next book. I shall go on telling lies to obtain my pardon. He will perhaps change the place of my exile. I may one day be able to live on a Greek island or perhaps in Sicily, near Agrippa Postumus and Julia. My elegies will make him say: 'Ovid is still the same, a servile flatterer, he's afraid of me, I can pardon him or assign him a more agreeable place of exile.' But he will never read these lines which speak of the terrible change that has taken place. He will never know the service he has done me by making me suffer. And if someone ever discovers this secret journal, that man can say that he has known the real Ovid.

The blizzard is gradually dying down. So thick is the snow that it covers the window. The house has grown warmer and more familiar. A fire is burning in the hearth. I have wine and provisions for several weeks, and last night I brought in the dog who at this moment is sleeping at my feet, though he pricks up his ears as soon as I cough or change my position to avoid getting stiff. I have given him his name. I call him 'Augustus', I feed him and when I feel inclined I give him a kick.

It is dark. Is this night or merely afternoon? I wonder whether there are still soldiers on the ramparts, because I no longer hear their voices at the times when the guard is changed. The Getae might take advantage of the snowfall to invade the town; they could also take it from the sea simply by crossing the ridges of frozen waves. It may seem odd, but I am not afraid of the Getae. People tell me that they are very religious and that they believe in one God, whose name escapes me at the moment. How can one God fill the whole sky with his person? If, as I think, the heavens are empty, this God must

be very small and all alone amid an unbearable silence and solitude. This one God must be like me, in this respect at least.

I was still quite young, at Sulmo, some months before my departure for Rome, when I had a presentiment of this revelation. I happened to be outside the town with my brother on a hill nearly surrounded by a loop of the torrent Avella. We were returning together from a long walk to one of my uncle's vineyards. It was early autumn. We stopped from time to time to gather the ripe figs which hung over the garden walls. The evening was calm, the air still warm and the olive leaves were turning gently in the breeze, showing their silvery undersides like small fishes in clear water. I was telling my brother some rather obscene mythological stories. I spoke in detail of the loves of Mars and Venus, for I was reading books and already knew many things about the intimate relations of gods and men. My brother listened in silence, dazzled it seemed by my knowledge. While eating his figs he kept looking back and would often stop to scan the nearby groves, interrupting in this way the thread of my narrative. 'What's wrong with you?' I asked. Surprised by my brusqueness he answered: 'You are not afraid of speaking like that about our gods?' I perfectly remember the words that then escaped me: 'Afraid of what? Because the gods do not exist.' My brother looked at me a moment in silence, waiting for an explanation; then his face went red as though he had received a blow and he cried out: 'It's not true, it's not true.' He began to run towards Sulmo and, when I overtook him near the town, he was leaning against a tree and crying. He did not push my hand away, for we were both, each in his own manner, passing through the same crisis. In Rome, later on, we were caught up in the social life of the place and grew accustomed to believing, if not in the gods, at least in man's attitudes toward them. But for that, it would have been impossible to live, to embark on a career, to succeed in anything, or make love to an honest woman or a harlot.

* * *

Is winter nearly over? I am not sure. One can rely on nothing

in this country. At any rate the sun is shining now, and I can move my hands again. I had to lay aside my secret journal because it was too cold to write, and for a month I lay up, like a bear in winter-quarters, with my dog Augustus. But how many things have happened ! First of all, Dokia has been assigned to look after me.

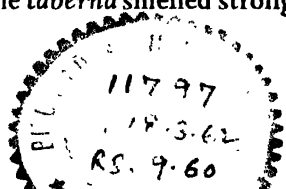
She still displays a certain indifference. She knows only a few Latin and a few Greek words, but is teaching me Getic, her own language. She is about twenty-five and lives near Tomis, in the native quarter outside the walls. On entering the house in the morning she looks like an animal, all muffled up in a sheepskin. She might be really beautiful if she were dressed like Corinna; and among the Getae she must surely pass for a beauty, with her chestnut hair and those deep eyes that try to look severe. Severe towards me, the Roman conqueror, or maybe simply towards man, because there has been a man in her life and I would wager a thousand sesterces that she is a widow, or has been deserted, and that she has or has had a child. I inquired about her of the centurion Honorius with whom I exchange ideas now and then. She is not a slave and, as far as I can gather, she renders small services to the Romans by informing them of the Getae's intentions; she certainly renders the Getae great services by informing them of the Romans' intentions. She is very serious like all barbarians who have not yet attained the subtlety of the smile but move between the extremes of gravity and noisy gaiety. She goes about the housework in silence as if she always had something to reproach me with. How can one feel love for such sulky silence? And how not feel love? The teaching of the *Ars amatoria* seems useless in presence of a block of marble which no caress has ever polished.

Artemis, when she has no clients at her house, sometimes pays me a visit, for I cannot live without women. Honorius had no difficulty in understanding me and it was he who introduced her to me. She is a Milesian, or at least her mother was. As soon as she comes in I remember the voyage I made to Greece, with my friend Cn. Pompeius Macer, when I was barely a young man. It was at Athens that I first knew an

Artemis. I told the present one of this old-time adventure and she, while chafing my frozen feet between her hands which were still burning hot, replied: 'It's a name that brings luck.' What luck has it brought her? Like all courtesans, she is content with very little. Perhaps she says to herself when she is alone: 'I might have been worse than that.' But what can one be worse than that? An exile—the answer comes quickly. I still find it hard to write, because my fingers have lost the habit. But some day, when spring is with us, I will tell the sorry story of 'lucky' Artemis.

* * *

When rummaging in a chest this morning I found Corinna's *focale*. The bright yellow has faded in the course of years but the perfume is still there, scarcely perceptible and yet so living, so strong, so sweet and so hard for me. As I held this scarf with its scent and its colour I was a young man again and spent the whole morning in Rome. I had just returned from my visit to Greece and Sicily—no, it was exactly a year later when I met her, in the Kalends of September. I had passed two months with my parents at Sulmo, where I had begun to write my *Medea*. I should have so much wanted never to encounter that Medea again, but her memory haunts the walls of Tomis and I am reminded of her again, the sad companion of my first enthusiasms. I have also had time to think of Gaia. Gaia was the daughter of a *violaria*; she lived with her mother in a little room behind their *taberna*, in the market-place. The old woman used to go out every night with a slave and a donkey to gather flowers somewhere along the Appian Way; and so Gaia remained alone during the last hours of darkness. Mixing with the swarm of carters who were already in the streets round the market, I would stroll about in front of the *taberna* while waiting for the old woman to emerge. It was very dark. A few torches burned before the open shop-doors, through which one could see faces, puffy with sleep, between piles of fruit and vegetables. The atmosphere as I entered was like that of a temple, for the dark interior of the *taberna* smelled stronger



than the temple of Cybele, so thoroughly had it been impregnated for years past with the scent of flowers. I would climb the few stairs leading to the *cubiculum*, which also served as kitchen and dining-room, and would grope in the darkness for the bed. Gaia was asleep. I removed my toga and lay down beside her. The smell of burnt oil mingled with the scent of flowers and of my mistress's body. It would still be dark when I left and I sometimes passed the mother returning with her slave and donkey laden with heavy bunches of roses, violets, lilies of the valley or chrysanthemums according to the season. I also strolled by Gaia's shop during the day, for she was very beautiful and at night I could never see her. I always bought my flowers there and, on taking a bunch, I would furtively squeeze her hand and speak words of love aloud, with a serious face, because her mother was deaf. The old woman was so much struck by my regular visits that she asked me one day: 'It's to your fiancée that you are taking these flowers, young man? You must be very much in love with her.' I replied with a nod: 'Yes, in love with Gaia.' The mother understood only the nod, and smiled and winked at me. She did not know that during her absence I took her place in the bed.

It was in this shop that I met Corinna. She was being kept at that time by a shipowner who lived in Ostia and came to see her once a week. I have written in the *Amores*:

*Non est certa meos quae forma invitet amores
Centum sunt causae, cur ego semper amem.*¹

What a lie! I loved only Corinna, I have never loved anyone but Corinna. She has been the *praeceptorix* of the *praeceptor amoris*. We were of the same age and were in agreement at once. For our love to be made perfect we had no need of all the formulae and recipes which in my 'Art of Love' I invented for the timid, the plain, the stupid and the elderly, in fact for all who, on meeting the object of their love, have not had the luck to meet Corinna. I followed her along the street, paying no

¹ 'Tis not a certain face that wins my heart;
For scores of reasons I shall be a lover.'

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heed to the mortally wounded glances of Gaia. When she was near her home on the Aventine, she sent the slave who was with her into a shop full of people and I was then able to approach and speak. She seemed timid, though she was not really so. Before I kissed her—and even months and years after our first meeting—she always had an air of not knowing me, of being surprised by my presence, just as on that morning in the street when I spoke to her for the first time. She lived in a house that had been recently built on the Aventine. (Is it true, what I have just written? Who gives me the strength to survive, to cry out a calamity which is not an illusion? I am really Ovid, the poet of Rome, Corinna's lover, the being who has had everything and lost everything? I had schooled myself to the thought of age and death. To that end were men created. But I am the only Roman citizen exiled to Tomis, as far away as possible from everything that has been my life. How can I convince myself that all this is in the order of things?)

Corinna lived in a house that had been recently built on the Aventine. Her protector, a certain Favorinus, had bought it for her. She came from Perugia where her parents had died, buried under the ruins of their home during an earthquake, and Favorinus, who was her mother's brother-in-law, had taken charge of her and made her his mistress. He was immensely rich and his age then was my age now: the age when one is betrayed and when one begins to betray without remorse.

She told me I could come to her house the same evening. We passed three nights and two days together. How can I speak of her without thinking of the common tragedy that has befallen us both? We were and are of the same age. But to what purpose these stupid regrets? She was beautiful when I loved her: that is the essential and no one can rob me of that truth. Her eyes were green, and looking into them gave me the impression of plunging deep into cool clear water. As soon as she was near me, quite near, her timidity fell away like a dress, and a wordless smile overspread her features and her body. She seemed to be flooded with the marvellous light of this smile

which began deep in her eyes and then covered her with its brilliance. Later on I would sit on the edge of the bed, while she lay with her head on my knees and I stroked her heavy tresses and watched the dark gleams of gold and copper that played among them.

Oh, how glad I am not to be writing as I was accustomed—or obliged—to write! There are no gods in my prose, no heroes, no mythological metaphors. I am free to write in secret as I think and as I live—quite simply. *Culta placent*¹ was my formula, my actor's mask which I left behind me in Rome. I shall continue this later. Dokia has just brought in my breakfast and I am hungry.

* * *

In obedience to an impulse which I am now ashamed of, I walked one day past Gaia's flower shop. She was there as usual, pressed my hand and murmured with a serious look, for her mother was present too: 'I shall expect you tonight.' I had not the courage to refuse, although it would mean a night less with Corinna. This took place a month or two after our first meeting; but how could one make a clean break with old habits? And then I remembered that Favorinus was expected in the afternoon, and so I was free. The October night was cold and damp, and while I waited in the dark for the old woman to come out I shivered under my toga. At last however I heard the door bang, then the donkey's steps moving away over the big paving-stones, and I went in. The *taberna* smelled like a cemetery full of chrysanthemums and the odour was so powerful that I nearly gasped for breath as I stumbled among jars and vases. I climbed the familiar stairway. I had been sure in the morning that it was a bad deed to have accepted my former mistress's invitation and now, amid the smell of flowers, cooking and poverty which made me think of the delicate perfume of Corinna's bedchamber, I was on the point of turning tail. But Gaia was already stirring under the blankets. I removed my toga as usual and bending down felt prudently with my

¹ It is the polished and elegant that pleases.

hand so as not to strike my knees against the side of the bed. But just as I was touching what I hoped to be Gaia, a cry like that of a fearfully wounded animal shattered the silence. It was the old woman. Gaia had gone out a few minutes before, leaving her mother in bed. I took to my heels, while the *taberna* rang with cries of 'Stop thief! Murderer!' This was Gaia's vengeance. I have never seen her since.

Rereading the story makes me want to burst out laughing. That autumn was the happiest period of my life. Success attended me, my name was becoming known and I was reading my first verses in the circle of M. Valerius Messalla, the prefect of the city, where I had once met the divine Virgil and now rubbed shoulders with Horace, Propertius, Tibullus and many others who were the glory of Augustus's Rome. Delia had become famous, for Tibullus had sung of her. I decided to sing of Corinna. What lover has not read my verses and tried to imitate the happiness of the perfect couple we were? Yes, those verses that expressed my happiness were, alas, the cause of my exile. Can I blame Corinna, can I throw into the fire that yellow scarf which marks the beginning of my misfortune? The empire of Augustus is vast, but Julia's love-intrigue is already corrupting it. My *Amores* are not the cause of the evil but only a reflection of it. My crime lay in writing about what I had seen. The Emperor, in the fury of his disillusionment, has confused cause and effect, and I am the scapegoat of that confusion. He has done everything he can to put an end to vice, to save the structure of the family and reinforce the worship of the gods and the cult of the fatherland; but who in Rome believes in all that, in spite of the laws and the emperor's example? And if Augustus is pure, prudent, austere and patriotic, his family is not. Julia is no more chaste than Artemis and less so no doubt than Corinna. I have often been present at Julia's debaucheries, but nothing about her shocked me because so many Roman women were like her. One night, in the house of Fabius, she began to moisten her finger in a cup of red wine and to sketch on a tabletop the most intimate details of Silanus's body, laughing wildly as she did so. All the guests recognized her talent. Growing more ex-

cited she approached Silanus and removed his toga and his other clothes in order to show us that she respected the canons of art established by Phidias and that her drawing was simply a good copy of nature. This was admitted. The men admired the drawing, the women the model. Then she drew a picture of herself and the scene ended in the usual orgy. Augustus heard of it, flew into a rage as he usually did when some action seemed to be aimed at himself, exiled Silanus and Agrippa Postumus, who had simply been guests, and drove Julia from Rome. But who had caused these crimes of lèse-majesté? He refused to recognize that the Empire itself, and therefore Augustus himself, had provoked this moral collapse, and that the more one went on conquering other peoples, the more the empire rotted from within, undermined as it was by the wealth that flowed into Rome from every quarter. Over 150,000 people in Rome are maintained out of the imperial budget, 150,000 idlers who are in reality living on the labours of conquered peoples. Augustus feeds them and fills the circus and theatre to overflowing with them, so that they may shout: 'Long live Augustus!' and thus furnish proof of his popularity and his power. But who would summon up courage to say to him: 'The source of ruin lies in yourself, and it is your power which will bring about our downfall'? He has found it easier to convince himself that the decadence began with my verses. 'Ovid has written the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria*,' he tells himself, forgetting that I had also written the *Fasti*. 'Ovid has corrupted our young people, he has given bad advice to married women (that is, to Julia), he has befouled everything: love, the family and the gods. Let us destroy the source of the evil, and the evil will disappear.' One evening he informed me of his sentence: relegation to Tomis. I have described that night of the Ides of November in the third elegy of Book I of the *Tristia*, an elegy I wrote during the journey out here. The memory of that last night in Rome ('Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago . . .') still fills me with hatred and despair. Here am I accused of destroying the empire, as if I were the emperor! I wandered from room to room, I went into

¹ 'When the piteous image of that night rises up before me.'

the garden, I returned, I sought everywhere for something to take with me, to enable me to endure exile, some image of Rome and of my past life. I found two: Corinna's *focale* and hatred for Augustus. Both images have, by chance, the same colour.



I should prefer not to devote a line to the horror that has brought down this catastrophe, but I cannot refrain from writing. It relieves me. Should I ever have spoken the truth, or even had a glimpse of it, if the catastrophe had not occurred? Ill-luck good-luck—am I not a disciple of Pythagoras? My official countenance is not dead, because in talking with Honorius I speak of the 'great' Augustus, of Caesar's 'son' (he thinks he really is, just as he thinks he is a god) and of the benefits he confers on the Romans; but exile has presented me with another countenance which I shall try to perfect in the coming years even if the god in his clemency recalls me to Rome. I am not the only man who sees the truth. Agrippa too perhaps sees it. But I am the only man to write it down.

All along the route, from Rome to Brundisium, and thence to Lechaeum and Cenchreae, from Imbros to Samothrace and Tempyra, where Sextus Pompeius gave proof of his friendship by receiving me at his table, in spite of the decree that excludes me from the society of honourable men—and also by providing an escort to see me safely through the country of the Bistonians —; then from Tempyra to Lampsachus and Cyzicus, to Byzantium, to Dionysopolis and finally to Tomis—all along this route I have thought and thought of the injustice that has been inflicted on me and of what means I can use to soften the anger of *Jupiter*. It was only after my arrival when I was uprooted from my past and all the falsehood which it was full of, that I made the discovery of myself. I suffer from being here and in my letters to Rome I struggle to obtain pardon and permission one day to return home or at least to be exiled to a more tolerable climate, among men who are not barbarians; but I shall never regret the moment that enables me freely to

contemplate my soul, without disgust or fear or humiliation. It was on the shores of the Euxine whose waters sometimes appear black, as if night were cradled in them, that I began to be a man.

* * *

During the day I remove the sheepskin from my window, and the sun bathes my feet like warm water. Between the *hora septima* and the *hora nona*¹ I leave the house to accustom myself once more to the light and the wind. It is not always the same walk that I take, but I am always obliged at the outset to follow the street which skirts the ramparts and leads to the port. The sea is rarely calm and the vessels, mostly Greek, are badly tossed about before they enter the little harbour. At the end of the breakwater that defends it from the violence of the waves stands a lighthouse, a graceful copy of the Pharos at Alexandria, in miniature of course. For everything at Tomis is smaller than elsewhere. There are Roman boats, too, from Brundisium and Ostia, which very often bring me letters; for my friends do not forget me, nor does Fabia. They even send me gifts, including books; last week I received from Fabia² a set of silver styles³ which I had wanted for some time past. I am still a rich man, Augustus not having confiscated my property,⁴ and I am sure Fabia is living more at ease since my departure, for she always thinks twice before spending a sestertius, whereas I had got used to spending whatever I liked. When I return to Rome, one day, my fortune will have augmented. It is a pleasure here to talk to the sailors, Romans or Greeks. They know everything that is happening in the world, and they are like me in this respect, that they are afraid of Augustus, as

¹ From noon to 3.45, summer solstice.

² Fabia¹ was Ovid's wife. She belonged to one of the great Roman families and had some connexion with Fabius Maximus who had been among the poet's early patrons and still remained his friend. Ovid was on excellent terms with Fabia and felt for her a good deal more esteem and affection than this novel suggests (Translator).

³ Latin Stilus, an instrument for writing on wax (Translator).

⁴ *Relegatio* did not include the confiscation of property.

much afraid as all the other human beings in the Empire. I have grown used to understanding this fear which takes the form of expressing loud admiration for the Emperor. How petty the Greeks are when they speak favourably of some political leader ! They have lost everything—freedom, wealth and, like me, the right to speak ill of people. The only gift they have preserved of all they once had is the gift for commerce, but that alone is not enough to maintain a people in the front rank. Philosophers and poets they still have, but the shadow of Augustus is darkening their works and little by little drying up the sources of their genius. Even so, these seamen revive my memories and I get them to talk about the cities and islands I visited over thirty years ago. They are respectful in our presence, but a slight smile at the corners of the mouth reveals their real opinion of the Romans. Our sailors do not care to mix with them because they feel the humiliation of this smile. There is often a brawl in one of the wine-shops in the wynds leading to the port, and I have witnessed a few. The gods themselves did not fight less roughly. They break everything within reach, and then you see them, locked in combat and rolling in the mud of an alley. I once saw a man from Samos hurled from a window like a ball. I felt certain he would be shattered but he picked himself up in a trice and returned to the fray. A piece of cloth wound round the left arm serves them as a sort of shield. Their white teeth look like knives. But blood rarely flows, for they are past masters in the art of silent combat, whether in a tavern, in the darkness of a brothel or at an ill-lit street corner. It is only the women who scream; but when the police arrive they find only the wreckage of the storm, some wounded man perhaps, the *thermopolac*¹ dazed or wounded, barrels and wine-jars broken and red wine flowing out into the street.

I sometimes go into these taverns which are usually kept by Greeks. The wine is good because it comes from the isles, though some shops sell the local wine which is rather more tart and fairly strong. It tastes of this earth which is still strange to me. I am told that the Getae are great drinkers and

¹ Tavern-keepers.

that during the winter they bury the vines to prevent their freezing. The cold often bursts the *amphorae*, and the frozen wine then has to be broken into small pieces which are placed by the fire to melt. When in Rome I would have sworn that the vine does not grow under the Great Bear and that what are called men in these latitudes were really two-legged animals devoid of feelings and reason. But judging from Dokia I can see that the women are more chaste than ours and that the men are men. It is possible to live in any region where one can make a fire and exchange words. Rome is a mere caprice, a pin-point, too brilliant perhaps, in the dark night of humanity.

Yesterday evening I paid a visit to Artemis at the other end of the town. The distances here, compared with those in Rome, are trifling, but the streets are still covered with mud, snow or dust. She was expecting me and had prepared a delicious dinner, really delicious by comparison with the primitive and monotonous meals that Dokia gives me. There were even sugared almonds, black olives, dried figs and Chian wine—gifts which wealthy ship-owners and captains bring for Artemis. She is far less beautiful than Corinna, but she has the art and refinement needed to dress with simple elegance and she knows how to say things that warm the blood and to pay silly but exciting compliments. In fact she plays her part with talent and that is all I ask for. Her talk is merely a prelude to love. All the stories she tells are about men and women who love each other passionately, about perfect couples, or about the loves of the gods, which are the most piquant, and which form the amorous repertory of every courtesan mistress of her trade. I have observed, in the course of my many adventures, that the adultery of Mars and Venus, the wife of Vulcan, was regarded as the most effective stimulant. Often when we are making love Artemis whispers: 'Oh, Mars, my love,' ranking herself with Aphrodite.

It is a pleasure to listen, as she speaks such marvellous Greek. I did honour to last night's feast, and she regaled me with details of her life. She mixes mythology with her life-story in a way often a little annoying, and has reached the

point of confusing herself with the goddess of love or other less celebrated characters. There are worse follies no doubt; but Corinna was much more realistic. The first chapter of Artemis's story is absurd. She lived at Sestos on the Hellespont, her parents were rich people and she had fallen in love with a young man who dwelt opposite, at Abydos, on the shore where once had stood the mighty walls of Troy, protected by the gods. In order to be with her, the young man used to swim across every night and she, with a nurse, would await him, waving a torch whose flame guided the swimmer. They loved by starlight, on the still warm sand of the beach, with the witching music of the waves to lull them, while the nurse slept or pretended to sleep not far away. But one night Artemis was so fatigued with her long vigils that she too slept, her torch fell on to the sand and was extinguished, and the young man, struggling far out amid the waves, being deprived of his beacon-light, was drowned. Mad with grief, Artemis ran away from home (her mother was a Milesian) and boarded the first passing boat, which took her to Tomis. Here, in order to forget the past and live in the present, she became the favourite courtesan of the great men and of all who had enough money to pay for a night with her. It is a very sad story. She tells it with such conviction that I dare not remind her of Hero and Leander, because it is their story she is reproducing. There is certainly some truth in the tragedy which gave rise to her career, but I think it useless to try and imagine where truth ends and myth begins. She would certainly be incapable of reconstructing the facts. After relating for the hundredth time the death of her first lover not as it actually took place but as she has contrived to mix it up with the mythological story, she finds it easier to think of herself as Hero than as what she was in reality. She confuses her first love with Hero's and all the later ones with Aphrodite's. Her early life was pure, close to the good earth; her life as a courtesan is, by association with that of the goddess, a fragment of the impurity of Olympus. I could not refrain from saying to her: 'You know, your story reminds me of Hero and Leander's. Do you know that story?' 'No,' she replied, unmoved by what I had said, 'but the thing

doesn't surprise me. Everything in my life resembles the life of some deity. An oracle foretold that I was the destined bride of a god. You yourself might be the god that I am awaiting. Don't be afraid, I'll not destroy you.'

She slipped to the ground and flung her bare arms round my knees. I am sure she sees the predestined god in every one of her clients. Her disillusionments must be pretty frequent. I had to come to Tomis to find someone with faith, a faith as intact as in the time of Odysseus, when metamorphoses were part of everyday life. What courtesan in Rome would be capable of thinking she was Venus, or confusing her first folly with Hero's and awaiting night after night the god who could give her true love and turn her into an everlasting star or into a sacred spring at the edge of the woodland?

It was dark when I left her house. The town was shining under the moonlight. I walked back along the sea-wall, and two lines in the letter that Leander writes to Hero before the fatal night arose in my memory:

*Unda repercussae radiabat imagine lunae,
Et nitor in tacita nocte diurnus erat.*¹

* * *

This morning I went up to the ramparts with Honorius. Landward, the eye ranges as far as it does seaward. Cherry-trees in bloom were shining like candles, scattered over the rolling plains. From the western tower which guards the main entrance to Tomis, one commands the whole of the town, the sea and the land of the Getae—a distant and mysterious land, of a green softer than that of the sea. Near to the walls, farmers were tracing diminutive furrows with wooden ploughs drawn by white oxen. They push the yoke with their breasts, not with their heads as in Italy. I observed to Honorius that this seemed to me a better system because the animal's strength resides rather in the breast-muscles than in the neck and fore-

¹ 'The waves threw back the image of the moon.
And in the silent night 'twas bright as day.'

head. Honorius shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. He feels only contempt for what people do outside Italy. He told me that this land produced virtually nothing and that the Getae from the west and north often set fire to the cornfields when the corn is ripe. 'Some day,' he added, 'Augustus will have to subjugate this land as far as the Danube and beyond, to bring it peace and prosperity.' And to teach these barbarians how to harness oxen. Rome pays him well and he knows that in a year or two he will be transferred to Greece or Italy, according to his merit. He can therefore only speak in this way; whereas for my part I should not like these free men to be obliged one day to build temples to the glory of Augustus.

* * *

I have a good deal of time before me, that is, if I count by hours and days; but not much if I think of the years that remain for me to live. Pythagoras used to say that life is divided into four periods: 'Childhood, until the age of twenty; adolescence, from twenty to forty; youth, from forty to sixty; and old age, from sixty to eighty.' I should now, according to this, be still a young man; but it is more likely that the sage of Croton meant maturity instead of youth. And had he known me he would doubtless have counted me among the old, especially if I had told him about my relations with women. He used to say: 'One should resort to Venus only in winter, never in summer; occasionally in spring and autumn. But it is always consuming and very bad for the health.' When a disciple asked him what was the best time for devoting to love, he answered: 'When you want to debilitate yourself.'

I had been familiar since early youth with the teachings of Pythagoras. A large part of Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* deals with him. But have I ever taken account of his wisdom? I have spoken of the gods when he spoke only of one god; I have eaten meat when he was opposed to any food that comes from an animal; he preached moderation in love, I have indulged myself immoderately. I am no longer a young man. Youth departed from me when I was twenty, at the age when

according to him it is merely beginning. He was an exile like me, because he chose Croton as his place of refuge in order to escape the evil treatment of the tyrant Polycrates. In the days when he had lived in Samos, his birthplace, there was among his slaves a certain Zamolxis, a priest who was later to become the *pontifex maximus* and the one god worshipped by my neighbours the Getae. What a strange coincidence! I find myself now in presence of all the enthusiasms and all the agonies of my youth: Pythagoras, Zamolxis—and Medea. I will speak some day of Medea, the symbol of my first successes in Rome, the woman who had founded Tomis. Our life consists in pursuing a road uphill, in reaching the highest point, and then beginning to descend, traversing in the reverse order all the mysteries one had traversed when going up. So death is merely a return or, as Pythagoras used to say, the way to another birth. I think of asking Dokia for information about her religion and her Zamolxis, my master's former slave.

* * *

To publish the truth about *him* even to the distant Parthians, to relate to the conquered peoples in Africa and Germany, dazzled as they are by his glory and his moral legend, the truth about Augustus's morals! When defending my books I wrote in my great elegy:

*Ilias ipsa quid est, nisi turpis adultera, de qua
Inter amatorem pugna virumque fuit.*¹

If my books are accused of encouraging adultery, what do we find in the masterpieces of the past but those forbidden amours which are the object of so many articles and so many penalties in the laws of Augustus? I alluded at the same time to Julia's misdemeanour and to the great sin on which the Emperor has

¹ 'A foul adultery, which sets at odds
The lover and the husband—that's the *Iliad*.'
(*Tristia*, Book II, vv. 371-3)

built his own marital happiness. Is he not in fact the hero of an adultery? Does not the emperor's whole life, amorous and conjugal, consist of a series of faults and crimes defined and punished in the *Lex Julia de adulteriis et de pudicitia*? He broke off his engagement to the daughter of Servilius Isauricus in order to marry Clodia, the daughter of Publius Clodius and Fulvia, a kinswoman of Antony. When relations with Antony and therefore with Fulvia deteriorated, he sent Clodia back to her mother: it is true he had not touched her as she was not yet twelve. So he had only married her in order to be related to Antony's family. His next marriage was with the mature Scribonia, who belonged to the family of Sextus Pompeius and by whom he had his only child, Julia—the child whom he was to banish later on to the isle of Pandataria. It is true that Scribonia was no Venus or Helen, and that she was older than he; but the protector of the Roman family does not divorce his wife on such frivolous grounds. Then he met Livia and married her. He had taken her from poor Tiberius Claudius Nero, an old enemy of the triumvirs, who surrendered his spouse to the all-powerful Caesar in order to save his life. He made a present of his wife to Augustus and received liberty in exchange. It was said in Rome that Augustus's desire to have Livia in his bed as soon as possible was so great that he compelled her to attend the marriage ceremony when she was about to have a child. This child, born into the family of Augustus, was Tiberius, the son of Livia's first husband. And when Julia was old enough, he obliged Agrippa, and then Tiberius, to divorce their own wives in order to marry the Emperor's daughter, each in his turn. Isn't it all more complicated, more inhuman and more immoral than the love-story which provoked the Trojan War? And are not the verses which he himself wrote when he was young far more indecent than mine? He will never forgive me; I have seen too much and said too many things. The last allusions in my *Elegy* are little calculated to please him. He has made laws to punish others, as he considers himself above any law. What hurts him, by reminding him of what he really is, are my verses. The servile, flattering tone I have adopted in letters cannot conceal from his eyes the shadow of Ovid, the

witness of his past and of his turpitude, a witness present in the form of these letters which are servile only to attain their end.

* * *

To escape, but where? It is only in Rome that life is worth living, or in Greece. But the habitable parts of the earth are all within reach of Augustus. I should be ready to take refuge among the Getae, were I not sure that their country is just an immense Tomis where I should pay for my freedom with what remains of health and hope in this old worn-out body, for which the only consolation is the hope of returning to Rome.

The other day I met the captain of a ship which was sailing for Trebizond. Once there, I might have been able to join a caravan bound for the East, for India or even further, beyond any known frontiers. I should have been free, and able to speak the whole truth. This sea-captain was ready to take me with him for a fairly modest sum. He did not know who I was. After arranging to be with him the same evening I returned home in a state of agitation which made 'Augustus' frantic. Dokia helped me to pack a bag and a trunk; she did not speak but watched me anxiously and her eyes had the same expression of panic as my dog's. Then, as I was trying to move the trunk, a sudden pain in the loins paralysed me. I had to lie down, with Dokia's help, while 'Augustus', with his paws on the edge of the bed, moved his head from side to side as if he wanted to ask me what had happened. He looked so funny that I burst out laughing amid all my groans and the tears that kept coming into my eyes. This pain, which lasted more than an hour compelled a change of plans. To abscond at my age would be an impossible enterprise. The circle of pleasures is contracting like the circle of light round a dying fire. Everything now will be limited to the bed and the dining-table. Sleeping, making love, eating and writing. I asked Dokia to return everything to its place and then went out with 'Augustus'. The sun was still high when, after leaving the town, I climbed a sand-dune by the sea. A few flowers and scanty grasses covered this hill which was no higher than my house. I sat and gazed down the long stretch of beach to the south, where a cliff rose in the

distance. Surface currents made moving arabesques on the calm blue waters of the sea. To my left I had a clear view of the port, with its roadstead and lighthouse. Towards the twelfth hour,¹ the boat that was to have taken me away left the harbour and the oars were shipped as soon as the wind caught and filled out the sails. I followed it with my eyes until it disappeared eastward, exactly opposite me, over the pure line of the horizon. I felt no regret. Stretching myself on the warm, fine sand, finer and brighter than the sand at Ostia, I fell asleep and had the same dream I always have here when my mind is quiet. I see myself at my house in Rome, walking in the garden. I reach the enclosing wall, which seems to me too high and not well situated. I should like to have it pulled down, so as to obtain the old view of Monte Mario; but when I tell my wife of the plan, she looks at me in amazement. 'Why demolish this wall?' she asks. 'It at least prevents you from seeing Tomis.' Then I remember that behind this wall is Tomis and that I do not at all want to see it.

When I awoke the sun was still shining. Dokia was sitting on the shore, not far away. She was throwing stones into the sea, while 'Augustus' jumped in to retrieve them and after emerging from the waves gambolled madly about the beach. Dokia was laughing silently. The woman and the dog were both happy because I had not abandoned them. I felt I was at home, surrounded by a small familiar world, a woman, a dog, a house, beings and things which had got used to my presence and could no longer do without it.

It was while I was getting up that Dokia approached and invited me to her house. 'It is quite near,' she said and gave me her hand to help me down the dune. The sound of the waves breaking on the beach, and the smell of seaweed rotting in the sun, inspired a sudden affection for this lonely landscape. Dokia's hand reconciled me with the earth and the immense clamour of the breakers which is nothing like the soft murmuring of waves on Italian beaches.

Dokia's house is on the outskirts of the working-class quarter; it stands in a garden between the sea and the

¹ After six in the afternoon

southern ramparts, not far from the sand-dune. One crosses the beds where cabbages, lettuce and tomatoes are growing between little runnels, to reach the white-washed dwelling which has a kind of sheltered terrace opening on to the garden and supported by wooden pillars. The sloping roof is made of tiny pieces of wood overlapping each other like scale-armour. A child was awaiting her at the garden gate, a fair-haired little girl, three years old, who is like her. Dokia's old father was leaning on a spade as he watched the thin stream of water that trickled along the canals and spilled out into a square of lettuces. He greeted me in Getic and then went on with his work, while the child followed us to the terrace of which the floor, like that of the house, was of beaten earth. Dokia made me sit on a round, three-legged stool and brought me a spoonful of honey that had been dipped in cold water. For some time past we have understood each other perfectly, as she is making progress in Latin and I in Getic. From the terrace we had a view of the sea, above the sand-dunes, like a green wall barring the horizon. Dokia took her place on another stool, at a respectful distance, and the little one flung her arms round her waist. 'What is your name?' I asked, for the sake of saying something. — 'Dokia.' — 'And your father?' The child gave no answer but looked at her mother. She said: 'Her father is a long way off.' But she did not tell me his name. 'Is he a Gete, like you?' She murmured 'Yes,' but in a tone to cut short any further enquiry. So I was not mistaken. There were a man and a child in Dokia's life, a secret she was unwilling to reveal, at least for the moment.

'You are not afraid of the Getae?' I asked. 'As you are in the service of a Roman they might kill you. Why don't you come and live in the town?'

She shook her head. 'No. My father has his kitchen-garden, and the child plays among the trees and by the sea. I am happy like this.'

'Happy, Dokia?'

She nodded.

'So young and good-looking, and without a husband,' I went on. 'How can you be happy?'

'To be happy one does not need everything one desires. I know that is not your opinion, but that's how it is.' Perhaps she was right, but our situations were different.

'You know, Dokia, I used to possess everything a man desires, and I was not happy.'

She nodded, and signed to the child to go and play in the garden. 'One is not master of one's destiny or of one's happiness,' she added.

'Then who is our master?'

'Zamolxis,' she answered, without hesitation.

The name seemed to fill the evening. It was as if sky, garden and sea had uttered it, so grave and sonorous it was, melancholy and potent, like the landscape he had moulded in accordance with his own way of being and thinking. I felt as though I were penetrated with his might and obliged as it were to obey and believe in him. Had he, even before I knew him, become the master of my destiny? This woman sitting near me had pronounced his name and it was the first time I had heard it from a living person.

While I am writing these lines I recall a curious thing. When seated in view of the rustic garden and exchanging with Dokia the words I have recorded above, I had completely forgotten my misfortune, and where I was and why I was there. From the lips of this woman I took knowledge of what Pythagoras, five hundred years ago, called the *one* god. And all else was blotted out, in face of this announcement which, at bottom, I knew already but the true knowledge of which had been awaiting me at the end of the world, under the walls of Tomis, as the only possible consolation. For we are not masters of our destiny.

SECOND YEAR



Are there any birds more tragic than these seagulls whose flight is so graceful but whose cries rend my soul as if they were announcing a disaster, or trying to revive the memory of another life, full of the most frightful crimes? I am thinking of Medea. The low-hung clouds cover the whole sky and impart a sinister hue to the sea which is at once green and grey. The snow-white wings of these birds of sorrow are outlined against it as they dive to catch a fish. Sometimes they hover nearly motionless, mingling their piercing cries with the sound of the tempest as if they wished to deliver themselves from the burden of the past. I am on the sandhill near Dokia's house. Winter has come, it is still mild, but I feel sure the north wind will bring snow, tonight or tomorrow. The grasses are dry and the wind whistles through their hard and twisted stems. The world is full of grief, and life like the wind passes through men, causing body and soul to tremble. Winter is near, summer was merely that brief spell of dazzling weather which made it seem possible to die. Shore and sea are deserted, and the port far away is empty. It is only the seagulls who can endure this climate and waken echoes in a nature so inhospitable. They were winging past with the same indifference on the day when Medea slew her brother, here, on this very shore, amid similar cries—and how well suited they were as an accompaniment to man's sins! From this sandhill or perhaps from that dim cliff in the south she descried the ship of Aëtes her father whom she had deserted to follow Theseus. She had been the wife of Jason and had helped him to win the Golden Fleece, at Colchis, which is on this same coast, a little further north. She

had killed. . . . But I have already told that story. I can see—yes, I can see the fair and evil witch as she wanders, her eyes full of anguish, along this foreign shore. Her father had found her at last, he was about to disembark, she could no longer escape his wrath. ‘. . . and though her mind was still full of immense audacity, pallor and stupefaction were in her face.’ These lines from the Ninth Elegy which I wrote less than a year ago march towards me like the advancing waves, as if the sea were my recorder. ‘I am caught, I must delay my father by some stratagem.’ Of such had her life been full. Had she not won Jason by a stratagem? Magic held no secrets for her. But in presence of her old father she knew that the incantations would not work; they were confused and useless, and the cry of the seagulls prevented her thinking. The wind whistled through the dry grass-stems and the sound of the waves drove her frantic. The presence of her brother Absyrtus, who was nearby, suggested a solution. She thrust her sword into his innocent side and cut in pieces the young body, made of the same flesh as hers, and yonder where the cliff is high she set on a conspicuous rock the bleeding head and pale hands of Absyrtus, gleaming like a lighthouse, brighter than the light of day, so that Aeëtes might see them from afar. Then she strewed over the beach and the fields the fragments of her brother’s body which her father as he pursued her would discover among the stones and briars. He would be forced to linger as he gathered up the horrible fragments and Medea would gain time to escape. I can see her flight, I can hear the sobs of old Aeëtes as he stoops down at every moment so as not to abandon his son’s flesh to the crows, and yet still hastens on to punish his criminal daughter. Medea is already far away when the old man succeeds at last in giving burial to the torn body, to the body whose memory hovers like a flight of seagulls over the town of Tomis.

*Inde Tomis dictus locus hic, quia fertur in illo
Membra soror fratris consecuisse sui.*¹

¹ Hence is the place called Tomis: on this ground

A sister cut her brother into fragments’ (Tristia. Elegy IX). ‘Tomu’ in Greek means ‘amputation’.

My second year of exile begins today. By this time next year I shall have been at home for some months. Augustus will surely be dead, my books will have reappeared in all the libraries,¹ and at the *Thermae* or by the fireside at home I shall be relating the exploits of *Medea*. The woman inspires me with horror and at the same time a deep pity. She was the plaything of the gods, who drive men to odious deeds in order the more thoroughly to punish them afterwards.

One night I was awakened by 'Augustus's' barking. There was a strong wind, rain was falling and the fire had gone out. I calmed 'Augustus', but when I was trying to go to sleep again, I distinctly heard a woman's voice crying in the night: 'Medeaaa! Medeaaa!' The dog again began barking. And I was afraid as I lay in my cold bed.

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Another winter has gone by, with its snows, its tempests and its isolation. I again heard the howling of wolves and the complaints of the wind in the roof. I had a long illness. For two months I was in bed, racked with fever, while my mind like a stag which has broken free never ceased pursuing all the paths I had pursued in the past. The smell of burning wood was enough to take me back home, to my house and my family. The odour of grilled meat revived the memories of childhood and the winters at *Sulmo* when my parents' cook used to roast a great Umbrian boar, seasoned with laurel and wild fennel, in the courtyard. The scent of a faded rose which *Artemis* brought me one evening evoked the nights I passed with *Gaia*, or *Corinna*, or others whom I had loved or merely desired at the end of an orgy. I have had enough time to rewrite all my books and even to write others in the style to which imagination lends wings: and above all I have had leisure, as never before, to think about myself, to lie cradled in the sweetness of the past or to tremble at the reality of the present which is for me a pitiless contact with the truths of life. Every man as he grows old must have these horrible visions which detach him from

¹ Augustus had Ovid's books removed from all public libraries.

the cheerful illusion of the wake-a-day life and reveal to him the vanity of all he has done and all he has been. But the vast machinery of the daily illusion, which is no more than a lie—our family, our wealth, and house, and friends, and native countryside—is still there, waiting to recapture us and set us on the path to a new illusion. We are compounded of little eternities that lead us step by step to the grave, past those dismal glades of clear vision which would end by killing us if we had the courage to linger in them. On coming to Tomis, the first thing I had to sacrifice was the machinery of make-believe. And I was about to invent a new one when sickness remorselessly confronted me with myself. Can a man be more pure, I mean less polluted with illusions, than an exile at Tomis? I am like the bandit Selouros, standing alone in the Forum face to face with wild beasts who in a few moments will spring upon him; and like Selouros I am aware there is no hope.

One night I told Dokia, who has scarcely left me these two months, about the death of Selouros. The fever had left me, I could breathe without pain and I was able to talk. Selouros, in the days of my youth, was a celebrated murderer from southern Italy who had terrorized the highways and forests for many years. One day the police caught and brought him to Rome, and Augustus used his execution as pretext for a public spectacle. I went to see it with Corinna, who used regularly to attend the *munera* and the *venationes*, less from any desire to witness the death and suffering of gladiators and wild beasts than from the pleasure of showing herself in the elegant crowd, who frequented the circus. Selouros was tied to a pillory in the middle of the Forum and hungry leopards and panthers were let loose on him. I had seen a few *venationes*, though I did not care for that kind of spectacle, but it was generally the animals who had the worst of it, for they fought with well-armed and experienced men. This time, however, the man's arms were bound. When the animals approached him he used his right foot to kick sand in the eyes of a panther which was preparing to leap on him. I can still see the panther rubbing its smarting eyes with its paw, in an attitude of childish innocence. For a

moment the tragedy that was taking place assumed the appearance of a game. The man seemed like a rather cruel little boy who in a sudden access of anger had thrown dust in the eyes of the cat who was expecting, rather, to be stroked. But the illusion lasted only a moment. Selouros was continuing to kick sand at his enemies with the mad haste of one who believes that this crazy expedient will save him, when a leopard sprang at him over the head of the blinded panther. I shut my eyes and stopped my ears, but it was too late. I had seen the look of surprise on the criminal's face and the blood that spurted from his throat, and I had heard the cry, very brief and cut short by the flow of blood. Long had been the expectation of death but death itself lasted only a moment. The murderer's body was very quickly devoured because, when I opened my eyes again, I saw only the bloodstained rope hanging from the pillory—which a few minutes before had held the hands of a living man—and the animals rending one another with fang and claw and making the very air throb with their screeches.

I said to Dokia as I ended the story: 'I am like Selouros now.'

She answered with a smile: 'Am I then the panther? or the leopard?'

'No. You would be the fantastic ray of hope. The sand in the eyes of destiny.'

A whole year has passed since she entered my service and she has learned to smile. I have made a friend of her. But she never speaks of herself and her life remains a mystery. I know she does not hate me and I have discovered, too, that she will never love me. Her heart has been given to another and the body of a Getic woman does not betray her heart. I shall have only her friendship or her pity. I therefore limit myself to applying the principles of my *Ars amandi* to my relations with Artemis. But for how much longer?

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Honorius also came to see me during the months when I was immobilized. He is tall and robust, and wearing the *penula*¹

¹ A large woolen cloak that was worn on days of cold, high wind or rain.

made him look still taller and more imbued with Roman dignity. He is one of the pawns that Augustus has scattered across the world to defend himself against the most distant and unsuspected perils. His eyes are small and brown and, at least at the beginning of our relations, I tried to detect in their colour, which reminded me of the descendants of the Etruscans of Umbria, any reaction of kindness or intelligence. It was he who brought Dokia into my house and who also introduced me to Artemis. But since our conversation on the ramparts, I had no longer sought his company and our relations were not what they had been.

I used to make efforts to talk when he visited me, because I was scarcely in the early stages of convalescence. It was he, therefore, who had to find subjects for conversation and to pursue them as he liked. There was something changed in his face and he appeared to me thinner and more preoccupied, but I soon perceived that the change did not come from within and that the transformation of his appearance was due to the beard he had grown, like the Romans of the time of Cato the elder; or like the Getae. I pointed to his beard with a smile. He blushed slightly, remarking: 'I feel less cold like this.' But I understood at once that there was another explanation. The Greeks, like ourselves, have not worn beards since the time of Alexander: only the barbarians have preserved a custom which makes them akin to wild beasts. The conversation quickly slid on to other topics and it is only as I write these lines that I remember Honorius's beard. I see a curious connection between this beard and the words the centurion uttered a few moments later. He very soon broached his subject, for he is not particularly subtle.

'You've never liked soldiers, have you?' he asked. 'You have even written verses to explain this attitude. I read those verses, some years ago, though I don't recall which book they were in. The military profession doesn't appeal to you, and you think it a crime to kill men.'

I nodded, and then a sudden terror came over me. This man had received orders from Rome and was questioning me. So they were collecting further proofs in order to justify my sup-

pression. It is all part of the Imperial technique. Far more important people than I have been assassinated and it is their deaths that haunt the sleep of Augustus and Livia. And yet, as the sea is frozen, who in the heart of winter could have brought instructions to Honorius? The interrogation was resumed.

'It's years since I left Rome. Can you, in complete confidence, tell me whether there are many people in Italy who think like you? I know that after Varus's disaster in Germany the Emperor had great difficulty in finding young men who were ready to enlist in the legions and take up a military career.'

This was true. So I was being made guilty of something more serious. I had not only corrupted the Roman matrons but also the young men, because it was in reading my verses that they had learned to despise the army and its honours. What was the good of defending myself? A sudden death would have spared me so many sorrows. 'Yes,' I replied, 'what you say is true. Our young men have lost any enthusiasm for war. But to make me guilty of all the ills that afflict the Empire is to do me too much honour and make me too important.'

'That was not my intention. I don't accuse you of anything. I have admired your poetry too much to think it guilty of anything whatsoever. And then I am myself a soldier who does not love his trade.'

This assertion surprised me. Was I not the victim of dissimulation? I had never, through a year of fairly close relations with Honorius, observed any disparity between the man and his uniform.

'Do you think our policy is just? The Empire is growing by the diminution or destruction of the other peoples.'

'What would you? There are on this earth only conquerors and conquered. Man is incapable of imagining any other solution. If ever Rome ceased to conquer, it would be her turn to be conquered by the others. I don't see what you are driving at.'

Honorius hesitated a few moments as he stroked his beard, a new gesture which added a certain nobility to his bearing.

'Augustus is old. Tiberius will succeed him. Do you think the Empire the best solution?' I asked.

'Augustus is a god. Tiberius will be another. One has no

right to doubt the gods. You know that better than I do.'

'Are the young Romans who do not like leaving Rome and going on campaign also of that opinion?'

'I can't say. I'm no longer young and you know how much I admire Augustus.'

'Yes, yes. It was simply that I wanted to know. I am being stultified by the life here. And I sometimes have absurd notions. Have you, for example, ever thought about our religion? Have you ever compared it with the religions of other peoples? I'm not referring to the Greeks.'

'Rome is swarming with foreign cults, Syrian, Persian, Egyptian . . .'

'No, no. I was alluding to the religions that speak to man of only one God. It is possible that these religions have found other solutions for problems that we consider to have been solved in only one way—a way that is perhaps unjust and false.'

I wanted to tell him I was ill-informed on these questions, so that he might go on talking, but at this moment Dokia came in with a beaker of mulled wine which she offered the centurion. Its aroma filled the room. We changed the subject, speaking now of the cold weather and my sickness.

Today, thinking over this strange dialogue, I can once more see Honorius's beard. What does the man want with me? Is he a clever soldier whom Augustus or Livia has instructed to compass my ruin? His reward would be a quarter of my fortune. That is the price paid to informers—an institution created under our first Emperor. Or is he a malcontent who is beginning to feel confidence in me? And in that case what sign has led him to divine my possible agreement or even complicity? He knows I write to Rome and that a word from me could ruin him. I can't see clearly; and I am tired. But after all, that beard. . . .

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Well, I am perhaps beginning to see clearly into this question of Honorius's beard. I have never heard of such a case. A soldier

against the whole Empire! But very few civilians in Rome know what the army really thinks and feels. The civilians have ceased to be militarists as they were in the days of the Republic when the Romans were ready to share in all the adventures of Rome; and since the disaster that befell Varus and his legions, it has been possible to measure the gulf that has opened between the people and the army. But this very difference clarifies the political situation. The civilians adore the Emperor as long as he does not summon them to arms; the soldiers adore Augustus as long as they are making war, winning laurels and taking their share of the booty, that is, all the time, since the Empire does nothing but undertake wars with a view to maintaining the idlers of Rome and to strengthening the attachment of the legionaries. Every victory implies a possibility of plunder. It is therefore just to suppose that opposition to the Empire, or to Augustus personally, if such opposition exists, can be possible only among civilians. Hence I find it difficult to believe that Honorius is a partisan of this opposition, even if he were an isolated case. It is true that he has spoken to me of our gods and of those of other peoples, of the one God, that is, the God of the Getae. It is not impossible that he has enquired about the religion of the barbarians and has discovered a truth opposed to ours; and that this truth has caused the Empire and its policy of permanent conquest to appear to him as an injustice. It is likely in that case that he has reasoned as follows: 'Ovid has been exiled to Tomis, therefore he has sinned against the Emperor, therefore he is disposed to agree with me and to be an ally.' But the word ally supposes some idea in common, a possible action in common, an organization designed to destroy the existing order and to build Roman society on new foundations. Now all that is purely utopian. There is no opposition in Rome. In intellectual circles, in the schools where the Republic is still held up to the students as a social and political ideal, among philosophers also, one might speak of an anti-imperial attitude. But that is far from constituting a danger.

The Imperial police are no doubt ever on the watch. In the Campus Martius, where people chatter in their *circuli* and dis-

cuss everything that happens within the limits of the Empire and even beyond, the Emperor has stationed soldiers in plain clothes to listen to what is said and make detailed reports on what they hear. Citizens have been arrested on the strength of these reports. Many have been exiled or murdered for one imprudent remark. And the slaves who live in our midst and have an opportunity to hear all that is said during a banquet or a mere family gathering—are they not the spies of the Imperial police? It was one such slave who divulged that affair of Julia and Silanus and informed the authorities of my name and the names of the other guests. Life has become impossible in Rome, in the sense that we live in terror of our own slaves. We cosset them, and give them presents, we no longer dare reprimand them, we dare not even free them for fear of giving the impression that we want to get rid of an inconvenient and dangerous witness. A slave turned informer has the right to an eighth of his master's property, if it is judged that his information has been true. This is the surest and easiest way to make a fortune, and people practise delation more than they go in for sports.

I remember poor Cornelius Gallus, the poet. After the battle of Actium, Augustus ordered him to pursue Antony, whose suicide he caused. Immediately after this he was appointed governor in Egypt, and here for some time, drunk with glory and success, regarding himself perhaps as a descendant of the Pharaohs, he let people flatter him as they would a god and fancied he was the equal of Augustus. Statues and temples were erected in his honour. One day, amid a circle of friends, he proclaimed his omnipotence, never imagining that the informer was near. He was summoned to Rome, judged and condemned to exile. And he did what I had not the courage to do: he put an end to his life. Augustus was not then in Rome. He shed tears on his return and in the presence of witnesses expressed sorrow for his friend's demise. He thought the punishment had been too severe, but at the same time thanked the Senate for having been so sensitive to the insults which Gallus had proffered against the sacred person of the Emperor.

This throws light on the whole situation. One must be

entirely heedless or else in the enjoyment of privileges if one is not to desire a change, if one is not to take account of a very serious fact. We have lost all our liberty, and a slave has only to whisper a word to a policeman, and we lose our property and our lives. It is therefore logical to suppose that the Augustan peace is peace under the shadow of fear and that in Rome or at Tomis there are people who think differently from the senators. Many like myself have had to suffer from it directly and have discovered the truth after experiencing in their own flesh the rigours of 'Jupiter'. But others have reached the same conclusion by coming in contact with other truths, far away from home: like Honorius.

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I said to Dokia: 'The *malana* was very good today.' How can I say *malana* in Latin, when this dish is unknown in Rome? It is eaten every day here and in the whole region. It is a porridge made of millet or even wheat and is served with cheese and butter, or prepared with honey. We eat it with meat, as we eat bread at home. *Malana* is a Getic word I use every day. I have grown accustomed to it as I have to the language of the country. My Latin has lost its purity because I speak it only with Honorius and with Dokia, whose conversation is a mixture of Latin and Getic which I perfectly understand because I understand Getic. I am even tempted to write verses in this language: its secrets, its softness and beauty are gradually being revealed to me. It is well adapted for poetry because, if at first contact it seems hard and barbarous as it is spoken through the beards of the natives, it takes on a different air when written or when Dokia, whose mouth has been modified under the influence of Latin, pronounces it in my presence without suspecting the change. I am also tempted to translate the *Georgics* into Getic, because it is a language well fitted to describe the charms of nature and the words often possess the resonance of the phenomena they represent. No one or practically no one here understands my poems. And when they reach Rome, who now has time to peruse lines composed so far away, lines on which the purity is disappearing or will soon

disappear under the onset of the foreign words I hear from morn to eve? Those who receive a letter from me take good care not to read it in public: it might get them into trouble, for I am the man whom Augustus has exiled and therefore his enemy. It is better to hide the letter as soon as it comes, even without reading it—to conceal it well away from the eyes of friends and slaves. What is the good of writing when one has no more readers? But, of course, I cannot live without writing. I shall die the day my hand is powerless to hold the pen. To write in Getic would mean getting for myself a new public and a new celebrity. I shall try to become a *vates* among the Getae. I am still young, according to Pythagoras.

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The little Dokia came to see me this morning and remained all day with her mother about the house and in the kitchen. This is not the only curious thing that has happened. Early in the afternoon when the sun was shining from the landward side, I heard the cry of the sentinels and then people hurrying along the street. Dokia came running into my room. 'Don't go out. The city is besieged.' I went out all the same, only to meet Honorius, who had just reached my door. He took me to the nearest tower and inside, amid the bustle of soldiers, made me change my clothes. It was useless to protest or say anything. I concealed my white hair under a massive helmet, strapped armour over my feeble breast, took the sword and bow and arrows that Honorius gave me and, tottering beneath the unaccustomed weight, climbed the stone stairway. The walls all around were alive with soldiers; the whole city, indeed, from young boys to old men, seemed to be there. But the appearance of these improvised soldiers was far from inspiring terror. The Greeks are not the warriors they once were. I found standing by me a bar-keeper of my acquaintance. He was mouthing oaths and threatening the distant landscape with his sword; but these were the sort of movements he made every day, they had in them nothing of the sobriety and discipline of the real soldier who has undergone a long training for combat. These good folk who were preparing to defend Tomis were unaccus-

tomed to war. They played the soldier as I played the exile, unwillingly. In fact this is the first time since my arrival here that the city has been attacked and despite the pitiful mien of my fellow townsmen, people do not seem to be afraid. I asked the bar-keeper: 'Will this last long?' 'A few hours, or a few days, or months,' he replied, and burst into a roar of laughter which made his belly quiver and the joints of his armour gape. 'Don't be scared. The sea is on our side. Only be careful of the arrows. They are poisoned and one hit would finish you in a moment.'

A band of horsemen was galloping towards the city. They were still some way off. Further to the left I could make out another party moving across a sunlit patch of ground. The fruit-tree was in flower just where I had seen it last spring. The fields under the wall had already been ploughed, the yellowish furrows gleamed in the sun, while the road, of a lighter tint, disappeared into the plain like a long, useless spear-shaft. Between the town and the advancing Getae not a soul was visible. The flowering tree, the field prepared for sowing and the deserted highway were the only signs of a presence which suddenly appeared fragile in face of the immensity of the plain and the living menace of that galloping horde which had materialized out of nothing and was hurling itself upon us like a storm bent on destroying everything in its path. I glanced in the other direction over the roof-tops of Tomis and the ramparts encircling them. How could one live in such a place, so frighteningly small, hemmed in between the blue wall of the sea and the infinite leagues of plain, crushed beneath a sky that was dappled with shapeless, inexpressive, inanimate cloudlets? Once again I saw the face of Medea and the scattered limbs of her brother. How could one live with this memory in the blood, how could people have founded a city on the site of a crime so horrible? And was not Rome, too, built on a fratricide? And then who in Tomis save me knows the story of Medea? If I told it to the bar-keeper, who is now taking a siesta under one of the battlements, he would merely hurl an oath at me! . . . The human situation is the same everywhere. Between man on the one hand, the land and the sea on the other, there is

disproportion. Land and sea appear too big and too dangerous, while an unknown force, sprung out of the unknown, advances on us at a gallop. In Rome people forget this because no danger seems imminent and one lives in make-believe. People think themselves immortal because they bathe at the *Thermae* in the midst of marble statues; they go to the *Circus* to witness the spectacle of death, which is as absurd as that of the unreal passions we witness in the theatre. In this way one confuses death with the spectacle of death, but one has only to leave Rome in order to encounter it again and to realize that it has never ceased to exist in us and to be lying in wait for us by the first road that leads out of the city.

The buckler hurts me, the bow is too heavy; I lean them against the battlement. I am cold in this armour, and afraid. To die here, beside this snoring brute. . . . And where are the gods now? Mars, Minerva, Apollo, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and all the others whom I have sung of in my poems and who have had the excellent habit of being present in battle, above the walls of Troy—I don't see them. The gods of war and blood and cunning have fled. We are alone with our weapons and our fear, useless things now that death is approaching. Where are you, son of Jupiter? My lips seek to pronounce an unknown name. Bow and quiver are vain things if a god's hand does not guide your hand and if victory and death are not equally desirable for the soldier. What is *Honorius* thinking of at this moment? And *Dokia*, who did not look particularly terrified? She had taken her child to the shelter of the walls, but her father had remained at home. Did she know that the *Getae* were to attack us today? The *Getae* are there, below me. Some who look like chieftains are wearing *Phrygian* bonnets, others are bare-headed, their long hair streaming in the wind. Some carry standards with the head of a wolf and the body of a snake that undulates with the motion. The air passing through the wolf's jaws causes the standard to howl and this continuous cry which grows louder as they approach fills me with terror. The bar-keeper has awoken, he fits an arrow to his bowstring and shoots; the arrow falls in a field, far from its mark. Others are shooting, to try to keep the barbarians at a

distance. But the latter are already near the walls, and their disciplined motions are those of real soldiers. Now a rain of arrows falls on the battlements and on the roof-tops behind the wall. I hear a cry but cannot look back. Then I too shoot, arrow after arrow, without looking, but I am sure I have hit nothing. A Gete falls from his horse—there are better marksmen than I—and I can see the wounded man, on his back, trying with both hands to pluck the iron from his breast, I can see the blood on his white shirt; then his hands cease to move, though they still clutch the weapon as if he had just plunged it into himself. The rattle of arrows on the roofs, on the walls and in the neighbouring streets seems deafening, or else my fear amplifies it; I remember the hail that used sometimes to fall in summer at Sulmo when I was a child and that gave me the same sensation of fear without possible shelter. I shoot; now I have only two arrows left and must keep them for later on. I place my sword within reach. I can see a few dead bodies, a few wounded men. The barbarians are withdrawing. they halt at some distance. The serpents are drooping along the standards and the wolves' jaws are all turned, silent, in our direction. The chiefs with Phrygian caps are conferring. Now one of the wounded crawls towards his friends and a horseman dismounts to assist him. 'It was I who hit that man.' The bar-keeper speaks in Greek: so I am alive. All these horrors are real. I am not dreaming; and no arrow has hit me. My fingers hurt, I am tired, but I remain upright, leaning against the cold stone to see what is happening. A thin column of smoke rises towards the sea, where the poor folk live. A white-sailed vessel is entering the harbour and no one on board yet knows what is happening on the landward side, beyond the walls. This vessel is certainly bringing a message for me because it is the first to arrive from Italy this spring, this spring that brings so many messages. The good weather, which melts the ice and snow, incites the northern barbarians to attack the outposts of the Empire. This is the message of evil. At the same time boats from home are arriving from the south. In Rome they know the times favourable for navigation on all the seas in the world and our sails are moving out in every direction to bear the

message of good and of peace as far as distant Britain and the distant Euxine. How can a man not feel happy to be a Roman in face of these mounted barbarians whose weapons are poisoned arrows? If Augustus were here at the head of a legion, I should fall on my knees before him and worship him as a god, the god of peace and civilization. And these savages would disappear, crushed by the strength and discipline of our soldiers. But it is I who am here, crazy with fatigue. My fingers are bleeding, and I feel old and ridiculous in this borrowed armour, with weapons I am incapable of handling, on this diminutive wall defending a city that is not my own. All this is foreign to me and at this moment I hate everything that is round me. A few Roman soldiers would be enough for the whole of this landscape, with its men, its sea and its land, to become something else, a familiar spot, a part of Rome. But I see only Greeks stultified by intellect and commerce and Getae besotted with poverty and ignorance. And between these opposite poles I am the only representative of Rome, that perfect example of equilibrium. This ridiculous attack has been enough for everything I had thought and written about Rome and Augustus to seem to me false and stupid. How can my small, personal grief justify the loss of my faith in Rome?

Evening is drawing on. The Getae are still there, but they have not attacked us again and are preparing to spend the night where they are; or so the bar-keeper told me. This may go on for hours or even days. Other horsemen are arriving in little groups, scattered all over the plain. Honorius walks up and stops. 'How are things? You can go down now, if you wish, but return before nightfall. It is probable they will attack again.'

'Is it serious?'

He looks tranquil enough. I notice that he has shaved off his beard.

'One never knows.'

He had brought me on to the wall, then, facing the Getae, to give effect to the instruction he had received from Rome this winter. Is he an enemy or, as he allowed me to understand, an ally? He has a chance, at this moment, of eliminating me

without showing his hand or betraying our appearance of friendship.

I have picked up one of the enemy's arrows in front of my door and am going to send it to Rome as evidence of the dangers I run here. I am engaged in writing as there is still daylight and the arrow lies in front of me on the table, its tip spotted with red and greenish reflections. Viper-poison, probably, or the juice of some plant unknown in Italy. The whole of this day is still present in my mind—the first day of war that I have known. I feel ridiculously proud, I who have hated war and the shedding of blood in doubtful causes. But today it is myself I have defended. My whole body is painful. I have just had dinner and am excited at the thought of passing the night under the stars. Dokia has looked out my winter *penula* which I shall wear over my armour, by and by, when I go and take up my position on the walls. I write quickly, the blood is kindling in my veins in a long-forgotten youthfulness. I am a soldier and despite my age I can well endure fatigue and emotions. I am still capable of living. If the Getae take the city, I shall die sword in hand. Dokia has asked me to let her sleep in my house, with the child. 'And what about your father?' I asked. Without looking at me, she said: 'He has nothing to fear.' He will certainly go out under cover of darkness and talk with his countrymen, whereas his daughter is already afraid of them and hides in the house of a Roman where she feels safer than at home. What is taking place in that heart of hers? Slowly the light yields to the darkness of a cool, clear night of spring. The Tiber flows gently under the bridges of Rome, young Corinnas are now preparing to go out, I can hear the rustling of dresses in the street, and the murmur of voices; a cypress quivers in my garden, a lover throws a bunch of violets into the lighted window of his mistress. Rome is within me, and I am ready to give my life so that she may endure, with her pleasures and her sins, to the end of time. What God can I implore to fulfil my wish?

* * *

From the top of the walls I watched the fires lit by the Getae

until after midnight. The sky was full of stars and the Great Bear glittered, dominating the firmament with its gigantic silhouette. Then came silence and the reign of darkness. I fell asleep and awoke a hundred times over, feeling for my bow and new supply of arrows. They brought us mulled wine to drink, with lamb's meat and slices of cold *malana*. But nothing has happened. The enemy's fires have gone out and we have awaited his attack in vain. My eyes were hurting me, from my efforts to pierce the darkness. And this morning, even before sunrise, I could see that the Getae were no longer there. They had disappeared during the night, taking with them their dead and wounded. The siege was over, the plain deserted. One could still see on the earth the round, grey stains left by their fires; while over the sea, in the other direction, a white sail still distant was moving towards Tomis, and the sun's disc as it rose above the waves filled the sail with light.

* * *

I am recording here a conversation I had with Herimon, the bar-keeper. It took place a little before midnight. The Great Bear was setting towards the west in a very clear sky. The enemy's fires were going out one by one and we thought an attack was imminent. Great torches had been kindled on the walls: they illuminated the plain to a little distance but invested the surrounding darkness with a darker and more threatening appearance. I could see my neighbour's profile as he did honour to the provisions he had brought in a well-filled sack. From time to time he would offer me something, which I declined with thanks. Suddenly he felt confidential.

'You have written love-poetry. Someone has just told me.'

'Unfortunately.'

'Why unfortunately?'

'Because those verses are the cause of my being here.'

'Ah!'

He did not dare go into details. To be acquainted with my secret would, he doubtless thought, have been dangerous.

'I also wrote love-poetry when I was young: verses I used

to recite to the girls I loved. But I can't write such verses now. May I ask why?'

'Are you still capable of love? The two things often go together.'

'You think so? Well! I'm going to confess something. Between ourselves. It has no importance, at least it hasn't now, because if the Getae attack us it's possible I shall leave my skin on this cursed wall, and then nothing will matter any more. It will be as if one had never existed. Well now! I've fallen in love with a woman much younger than myself. I should like to tell her, and recite verses as I once did, but I've forgotten those I composed in my youth, and as to writing new ones, I can't do it. I'm a married man of nearly fifty, big and fat, whereas she is young and slim. How can I speak to her of love without looking ridiculous? It appears that you are famous for having written a book of advice for lovers. Am I worthy to ask your advice? At my age one suffers for love more than at twenty.'

Herimon suffering for love! Who would have thought it? He did not look as if he were but, then, people's appearance is often quite misleading. It was not the easiest of things to give him advice because in my own books I had not been addressing actual people, but a general category, a crowd of lovers without features or personality. To tell him to take this girl to the circus or the theatre, and do this and say that, would be senseless because here such opportunities are very rare and because Herimon, being married, could not show himself in public with a woman. We are not in Rome. Nothing of what I have written in the *Art of Love* is valid at Tomis.

'Is she a young girl or a married woman?'

'A young girl, of course. That complicates things, doesn't it?'

He had ceased masticating and was watching me with little, sad, hopeless eyes.

'Yes and no. A young girl generally looks for a man of her own age and thinks of love when she thinks of marriage. But she is also much more sensitive than a married woman to the homage of love, wherever it comes from. You have no hope

and at the same time you are at an advantage. Is she rich or poor?’

‘Poor, rather.’

‘You often see her?’

‘Nearly every day. She buys wine from me. She lives with her old mother quite near my shop. The father died some years ago; fell under the ice while fishing.’

‘Is she engaged?’

‘To several men. She’s of easy morals, they say. You understand. In order to live. She’s the devil of a coquette. Her glances go through me and make me blush like a schoolboy. It’s idiotic at my age, I fully admit. But I never dare let her know of my passion. And then my wife is nearly always about, making something or other in the shop.’

‘Begin by giving her a present, without your wife’s seeing it, and then arrange a meeting by letter.’

‘That’s what I had thought. But this letter ought to be a poem, and how can I write a poem without falling into the banalities that belong to the thousands of prosaic days that make up my life?’

‘Do you understand Latin?’

‘Fairly well. I learned it from the sailors.’

‘Listen, then:

*Sit tibi credibilis sermo consuetaque verba,
Blanda tamen, praesens ut videre loqui.*

‘I understand. Let my letter be as my very voice. as if, when reading me, she saw me in her presence. It’s not easy. Life has killed any poetry in me. If I wrote to her as I speak or think, she would take fright. She would say to herself: What a dirty brute!’

‘She is not, however, an innocent, from what you tell me. Your thoughts might not frighten her, as she is already inured to life. But what in fact do you want from her?’

‘A little love. I need love, to forget the approach of age and death, my appearance, my present and past, and this stupid life which I have made for myself, day after day. To forget

everything, I need love. It's the last thing I ask of the gods before I die. Is it too much to ask?'

I ought to have answered: 'Yes, my poor friend, it is too much. This pure love or appearance of love which you desire with your whole heart, to *forget everything*, does not exist and is impossible. If it were possible, your consolation would be complete, but one must never forget that life does not end among laurels and roses. I personally am content with Artemis at times when I want to forget everything. And it's sad.' But how could I tell him such things, especially on this night which might be the last, for both of us? I answered: 'No, what you ask is not too much. It's simply a question of making yourself understood. I might perhaps give you an idea, even help you to write the letter.'

'But I dare not. . . . The honour is too great. You are a Roman poet, I a mere bar-keeper.'

'You are a man; and we are of the same age. I understand you and your trouble.'

He groped in his bag and offered me an apple. It was a marvellous thing, shining in the torchlight like a small red moon. An apple in spring is very unusual. This one was perhaps the last in the store-room and he would have to wait months before gathering others in his garden. I accepted it. It tasted of youth.

'Some day you will do me the honour of coming to my house: you will always be welcome. And if you come a little before lunch you will be able to see her. So it will be easier to . . . to write to her. How can I thank you? Ah, I was forgetting the essential. She doesn't understand Latin and scarcely speaks Greek. Her mother is Getic.'

'We will write in Getic, Herimon.'

He gazed at me in stupefaction, his little eyes shining and incredulous. The round face which had appeared vain and stupid a few hours before, seemed now like the face of a child listening to a tempting and impossible promise.

* * *

It is a long time since Fabia has done anything for me. If my

own wife is growing accustomed to my exile and perhaps also to the idea of final separation, what is one to think of the others, of all those friends who used to spend two or three hours with me, between the verses I recited and a good supper at the end? I am so far away that my fate must gradually have become a matter of indifference to them. One can die then before being really dead. 'Non omnis moriar,' said Horace. True, he was thinking of his verses, not of himself, when he wrote those optimistic words. I went down to the port this afternoon to get the letter that Fabia has sent me, with the books I asked for in my letter of September last. There was also a chest full of good things which I shall give as presents to Dokia and her child and all my friends at Tomis. And this very evening I am going to write a letter of bitter reproaches to my wife. She ought to go and see Livia every day, to speak about me and find means of securing my return. Have I not expiated all my faults? But if Honorius has already received orders to get rid of me, what is the good of all these entreaties? And, especially, what is the good of my servile attitude to Augustus? Ought I not to be insulting him in my letters, instead of imploring him as if he were a god? No. It may be that Honorius has received no order. Who could have brought him such an order in winter, across the snow-bound Haemus¹ or over the stormy sea? I shall not change my attitude, because a pardon may still come and self-humiliation is the only way to the heart of Augustus. To deal with him in a dignified manner is to condemn oneself. If the Imperial régime persists after the death of Augustus, every Roman will be humiliated, because for the Emperor there is only one free man in the world. All the others are slaves: they owe him everything, he owes them nothing. If some force still unknown brings about the fall of the Empire and if our present way of life becomes only a distant memory, this will appear as the most glorious age in the history of Rome and also as the most painful for the Romans. For we have lost our freedom at the moment of surrendering to Caesar the right of thinking aloud.

It is better for the moment to limit myself, to try and pass

¹ The Balkans.

the time pleasantly and become more familiar with the life around me. Dokia, Honorius, Herimon and Artemis are already part of this life: a Gete mysterious as the country that stretches beyond the Ister, a Roman who has turned against the Empire, a love-lorn Greek, and a provincial courtesan. By their means a new world is opening to me. It is probably not without dangers and pitfalls, but I have reached the age of prudence and wisdom. Rome represents the past which I know. Here is the future, all around me, bristling with secrets and unknown days. War, even war which I have always hated, no longer frightens me.

I have just returned from taking Dokia home. Outside the walls we passed two houses that had been burned down, the ones of which I saw the smoke during the siege. All the others were intact. The old man was in his garden, digging. His name, I have learned, is Dyzzacus. He chatted for a few moments while Dokia disappeared into the house to prepare a meal for her family, after being absent for two days. I asked the old man: 'Why didn't you come to my place during the siege? You are not safe here.' He gazed at me with his little blue eyes, nearly concealed under the eyebrows that droop on to his cheeks like thick moustaches. He seemed to be saying: 'I fear no man.' Aloud he said: 'Thank you, but I am not afraid of my people. And then I am old. Why should I hide?' He hesitated a moment, made as if to go on working, then leaned his right arm on the spade-handle and said: 'My people are not as cruel as you suppose. They are men like all the others.'

'Quite so. But they prefer the language of poisoned arrows to that of words.'

'You receive them with arrows and with your gates shut against them. How do you expect them to respond?'

'Why did they set fire to those houses?'

'It was the occupants who set fire to their own houses. They have gone back with their fellow-countrymen. Over there, beyond the river, are vast lands which only await the husbandman in order to bear fruit. And then they will be free.'

'And did your horsemen come in such numbers and from so far simply to take a few people away?'

‘They came from so far because they were hungry. The winter this year has been a long and hard one. They wanted to eat and take back something for their children. They would have given gold in exchange for corn. They would even have attacked the city to relieve their hunger, but they were too exhausted to fight. I saw them and spoke to them. I gave them everything there was in the house.’ And he added: ‘People could live in peace if they were not afraid of each other. Fear makes us speak different languages. Life becomes an unending war, life is war and more so every day. People forge weapons instead of inventing words of peace. You who cultivate words as I cultivate the ground, why don’t you invent the word of peace?’

The word of peace! We shall seek it for long years yet, for it is not a thing that is invented. Men will find it one day like a strange flower beside a long, long road. But the times are not yet ripe for this joy. Thousands of poets will be born upon earth and will die, glorified amid their own languages which are mutually unintelligible. And even if this word of peace were discovered today, centuries would have to pass before it become common property, a boon intelligible to all men. For its meaning is not easy to grasp, especially when the shrill summons of the weapons we carry is echoed in our own hearts. Is it not the poet’s task to explain the true meaning of this word?

Dokia had appeared on the door-sill, her arms hanging limply beside her, while her eyes as she gazed at us in silence, were full of despair. She had found nothing in the kitchen: all the provisions had departed with the famished Getae. Her eyes followed them afar, in their painful retreat.

I returned home late; the warm and peaceful evening closed in on me and I felt this was really springtime. The calm voice of the sea came to my ears. I thought of the hundreds of horsemen who, in the dead of night, had abandoned the siege, their stomachs still empty; men impotent in face of these walls which I had considered too frail to resist them. I could see them wandering home, empty-handed, across the plain. I thought of the wives and children who were awaiting them hopefully.

What would become of them? Where would they go? What were they going to eat until summer? Who could come to their aid? Men like myself were dying of hunger, and even before listening to them, we had greeted them with arrows and gates closed against them, as old Dyzzacus had said. They had been unable to speak to us, we had been unable to hear them. That was the trouble.

THIRD YEAR



During the year that has just ended I have had to write too many letters, to my wife and distant friends. I have never forgotten these secret pages of my journal, but I have lived ardently on the hope of returning, and this feeling of external pride has prevented my being just to myself, has prevented my recognizing the truth and recording it. For months I have preferred the lie, the old, faithful, familiar lie. To return to the reality which I have forced myself to confess in these pages would have been to admit defeat, to accept despair with stoicism and abandon the illusion of a return, in order to devote my attention anew to the real people and circumstances that surround me, to my life as destiny has willed it. Hope has fallen once more, like the snow and the first frosts of winter. Buried as I am beyond the frozen Euxine and the icy wastes of Haemus, no sign from Rome can reach me for months. Even the Emperor's pardon, if it were forthcoming, would have to await the thaw. And I am aware that no one in Rome is now thinking of me or of the possibility of a pardon. Augustus has too much to do. Each one of us is an Augustus, master of a limitless empire that keeps us busy through every moment of the day. One has no time to think of other people's troubles for two months or end. I can see that; and so I return to the pursuit of my own Golden Fleece.

There has been another reason for my silence which I should like to conceal, but I have imposed on myself the duty of speaking the truth and I will speak it, no matter what is thought of me by those who read these private jottings. A new love has restored my lost hope. Youth has come back to

me, thanks to this young woman who has spoken to me words of love in Getic. The nights spent with Gaia have been renewed, but this time far from Rome, on shores and at an age hardly favourable for love. Here I am at Tomis, over fifty years old, my scanty hair nearly white; but my bodily ardour which I had thought nearly dead has known a new spring-time, probably the last. With Lydia I have been what I was ten years ago, and I have dreamed of returning to Rome, with her of course. During many a long afternoon I have told her about the marvels of my past life, I have strolled with her along the sunlit streets, I have bought her a little house on the Janiculum; and I have covered her with flowers and jewels, because I have always been a generous lover. She listened to me in silence, wide-eyed before this fairyland of which she was the heroine, and she has rewarded me in her own way with all the subtle caresses I have taught her. I can say with pride that I have brought civilization to Getia.

This is how I came to know her. It was after the famine-stricken Getae had besieged us, towards the Kalends of June. I decided one day to visit my friend Herimon, the love-lorn bar-keeper, and I went to see him a little before noon. He received me as he had promised, with a joy that was very pleasing. He was alone in the shop, as his wife was ill. 'Nothing serious,' he remarked, with a shade of regret in his voice. I saw that his love for the girl whom he had talked so much about during the siege was not dead. I gave him a little love-poem which I had written for her in Getic, and his delight was unbounded. I was obliged to swallow a few large cupfuls of Chian wine and to sit with him by a table near the counter. A few customers came in and he would get up to serve them. He sang my praises to each in turn: 'The great poet, Ovidius Naso, the worthiest successor of Homer' (Homer being the only other poet he knew of). He had some difficulty in reading my poem, which was written in Latin script; he admitted also that the object of his passion could neither read nor write, and that he was going to learn the thing by heart and recite it to her when there was an opportunity; or else he would give it to her and she would get a friend to read it as if it

were a letter. 'Don't go so soon,' he added. 'She should be here at any moment and you will know her. It's worth the trouble, I swear by Aphrodite.'

It was really worth the trouble. Lydia came into the shop a few minutes later and Herimon at once invited her to our table. By Aphrodite, she was beautiful, even more than I could have imagined. The mixture of Greek and Getic blood is a happy one. I have already noticed several examples at Tomis, men and women of faultless bodily perfection. Lydia was rather slim, with green eyes, black hair, a skin white as snow; haughty and graceful in her carriage, a sensual mouth and little arched feet in old, worn sandals. Herimon read her the poem and was imprudent enough to reveal the author's name. He had become bold. While the reading continued, she never ceased from watching me, and her eyes bespoke the admiration these verses inspired in her. My poetry has always had a remarkable gift for moving the simplest souls and subjugating the hardest hearts. The effect of the poem was instantaneous; I realized this while Herimon was expressing his passion, which Lydia regarded as mine, because I was the author of the poem and she was there, facing me. Herimon's voice was just a go-between. When the reading was over, she got up, placed a chaste kiss on the cheek of Herimon who grew even redder and more awkward than usual, filled her jar with wine and went off without paying, leaving behind her a silence which neither of us ventured to break.

'What do you think?' my poor friend asked after a time.

'You are a fortunate man. All you lack is a little courage.'

'I don't need any more. She understands everything, I feel certain.' And he filled the cups again. 'Do you think she will resist me much longer?'

'That depends only on you. Don't hurry things. She will fall into your arms like a ripe fig.'

I wished to gain time. But I saw her the next day, in the street. She was coming from the harbour, carrying a basket of fish. She smiled as she greeted me. I wanted to avoid her, but the smile was like a net.

'I have just caught them,' she said, showing me the fish.

'We are poor and I can't always buy fish in the market. May I offer you a few?'

'Thank you, but I don't care for raw fish.'

She quickly understood. 'May I venture to invite you to the house this evening? It's a very humble house for a Roman, a man like you; but I know how to cook fish. You will not be sorry.' And she smiled again. I accepted.

The afternoon seemed long. It was hot. Summer had come abruptly, that very day, as is usual in these latitudes where gentle transitions are unknown. Lydia occupied the first floor of a stone house, reached by an outside stairway. The room where she received me was lit only by the fire; above this hung a large cooking-pot in which the fish was simmering. On a low round table a smoking *malana* had been turned out on to a white linen napkin. An odour mingled of fish and pot-herbs filled the apartment. Beside the *malana* were two ox-horns, which were to serve, in the Getic fashion, as drinking-cups.

'Your mother is not at home?' I inquired.

'She is going to spend the night with Herimon's wife who is still sick.'

The atmosphere and poverty of this room, the mother and daughter living alone there--and also the fear of being taken by surprise--all this reminded me of Gaia. But the situation was much more complicated, as I was to learn. I sat down while she served the one dish she had prepared, and as she bent over to pour the soup into a kind of earthenware saucer, I put my arms round her waist. She carefully laid down the saucepan, and then sat on my knees. She weighed practically nothing, but her lips swept away time and sadness like a whirlwind. I had forgotten that life without love is meaningless and that all the philosophies and all the sorrows in the world can disappear in a kiss.

* * *

She often came to my house on nights when her mother, who looked after the sick and prepared the bodies of the dead for burial, was not engaged in the city. Our love lasted until the

end of the summer and would have continued, because I loved her, if an event, which surprised me only because I thought it possible in Rome and impossible at Tomis, had not calmed my ardour. Lydia was betraying me. I suspected it, but this was merely a suspicion. It was not she who disgusted me but the man who was holding her in his arms. She had barely left me one night—I could not go to sleep, being obsessed by the memory of her—when I dressed and went out with the idea of going to her house and speaking to her and remaining if she was alone; or else signing to her and persuading her to return at once or later on. I quietly mounted the stairway and drew aside the rough cloth curtain which served as a door—and there I saw Lydia in the arms of Herimon whom she was embracing. Both of them had their eyes closed. I could see the sweat running down my friend's enormous cheeks, while a horrid stench filled the miserable room, a fitting apartment for these inferior creatures. What struck me most, however, was the face of this woman which I had covered with kisses a few hours before. She seemed to me ill-favoured and vulgar, her features discomposed with the heat and with a feeling that wavered between excitement and disgust. It was obvious that Herimon had profited from my poem and his own money. I descended quietly and returned home. I did not hate them. Herimon had come into his rights and Lydia had found an escape from poverty. Their idyll was the work of my verses, but this gave me no satisfaction. Tormented by a kind of despair, I made my way to the house of Artemis, but here too there was someone.

A few days after this I undertook, with Dokia, my first expedition into the Getic country. It was she who had had the idea, without telling me her object. Mysterious as usual, she called for me in the afternoon with a donkey-drawn vehicle. I took my place at her left, on a plank, and after crossing the town we emerged through the north gate into the open country. We immediately took a road, or rather double foot-path, which skirted the cliffs and proceeded at a trot towards a place of which I have forgotten the name and where Dokia had business 'with the fishermen'. This was all she told me.

Not far from the town, in the shadow of an acacia, I saw some tombstones which bore the familiar words: 'Have confidence', under a lotus flower cut in the stone. These one-time dwellers in Tomis had practised the cult of Isis, they had been happy before they died, because they had had confidence; they had been sure of eternal life. It was the living they now addressed, in an effort to inspire the same hope in them. Was it not a farce? This voice was not a voice, for the letters carved in the grey stone came not from the beyond but from the hand of a living artist; and no one knew what his faith was or whether or not he was sure of personal survival. All we know about the beyond and about eternal life comes from the mouth of the living. After two hours of travel we reached a stream where Dokia watered the ass. We forded it without difficulty; and then, instead of climbing as I had expected, the road went downhill and soon merged into the sand which made painful going for the ass. The beach grew wider and wider, the sand became finer and the air extraordinarily fresh and pure. The freshness of it inspired me and I told Dokia all sorts of tales that made her laugh. I had neglected her these last few months and as I sat beside her, the perfume of her white tunic made me want to take her in my arms. I did not do so, though I don't know why. There dwelt in her a kind of joy in perfect harmony with the deserted landscape around us, a mysterious joy that embarrassed me. She seemed to be compassed about with a multitude of allies who would have defended her; and I was alone, entirely in her power. I devised pleasantries to make her laugh, as if the relations between us had changed in a sudden and inexplicable manner. In this country which was familiar to her but which I was seeing for the first time, Dokia had become the mistress and I her slave, or something of the kind.

After three hours of travel we at last reached a fishing village. The miserable huts, half buried in the sand, were supported by wooden beams and roofed with dry earth. The sea lay a hundred yards below. From the low eminence on which I stood I gazed to the westward over a landscape of ineffable beauty. Not far away the colours of the sunset stained the

glassy surface of another sea, of which I could discern the distant shoreline. It was really a freshwater lake, as I learned soon after. Boats, quite motionless and with sails reefed, dotted its surface like little black islets—fishing craft which had never heard of me or of Augustus and which seemed to have been there since the beginning of time. Fires crackled in front of the cabins and women were moving round the flames. Other boats lay on the beach by the sea, where the men were preparing nets. One of the fishermen left his work and came towards us. On seeing me he raised his hand in the Roman salute and addressed me in Latin. I answered in Latin and then in Getic, but he continued the conversation in our language, which he spoke without any foreign accent. His features were Roman, his beard, gestures and clothes were those of a native.

‘I’m from Ostia,’ he said and signed to me to sit on the ground by the fire, over which the fish soup, whose smell I recognized, was bubbling. A cold *malana* had been turned out on to a low table, so that its yellow under-surface was uppermost. ‘I had another name at home,’ said the stranger. ‘Here I am called Mucaporus.’ He smiled and held out an ox-horn into which he had poured wine. ‘What are the news from Rome?’

‘I left there nearly three years ago. What news could I give you?’

‘They would always be news for me. I left Ostia fifteen years ago. I am what you call a deserter.’ And he smiled again, heedless of any effect which the word might have had on me. He was a man of about forty, tall and robust, with dark tousled hair, a long beard straggling over a nearly naked chest, tanned by long exposure to sun and sea; and with bare feet. ‘It was from Tempyra in Greece that I fled. This land— and he pointed westward beyond the quiet lake where the sunset was dying —is full of deserters, married to Getic women and happy like me.’

‘Why are you happier here than at Tempyra or Ostia?’

‘Because I’m master of my days and nights; and because no one forces me to kill men. I am free. What does one want more?’ He smiled again and filled the cup. The soup was

ready. Dokia and Mucaporus's wife served us in silence. I could not refrain from asking:

'You still worship our gods?'

'I worship Zamolxis, the true God.'

He carried the big wooden spoon to his mouth and blew on it. He ate decently, like a true Roman. Maybe he was the son of a shipbuilder; he must certainly have known Favorinus who had been Corinna's first lover; but he worshipped a barbarian god and lived among barbarians. This suddenly appeared to me a horrible destiny, the most horrible that could befall one of my people. Yet the smile of the old legionary told no lie. He was happy. What more could one ask of life? The price of freedom is high, but it is always worth the price. Was this really so hard to understand? It is enough to be able to choose a new life, anywhere, beyond the bounds of the Empire, and a new God, the true God, to be born again—here and now, and not after death, as the religion of Isis teaches. Everything is possible. But one must have the courage to desert in time, to break vigorously with the past. Mucaporus. The name did not frighten him. A new man dwelt under this graceless appellation, and he had the indecency to proclaim his happiness to me, a Roman citizen. My silent indignation was no more than a pose. Beside this fire and wretched hut, on this land bounded eastward by the sea and westward by the lake, I felt that this man deserved admiration, not only for having transformed himself and won to inner peace, but especially for having discovered a new way of life. Here was a Roman who could live far from Italy, even outside the Empire, who could deny Augustus and the gods of Rome, and who felt better off than before, happy amid this healthy, primitive poverty whose God was superior to Jupiter and all his divine family. I was ready at that moment to recognize that, far from having taken a backward step, this man who had chosen an apparently sad and miserable kind of life had acquired something which the Romans had not yet arrived at knowing. But I held my peace. The soup was excellent and the journey had given me an appetite.

Something strange is happening around me and in me.

What are they looking for, all these deserters whom Mucaporus tells me of? Merely fields to till and Getic women as wives? And why do our women prefer the cult of Isis and Osiris to that of Jupiter and Augustus? Would they not, too, if they could, follow the men who escape into the country of the Getae in quest of the one God, but also of something I should find it difficult to define or express in logical terms? Who could prevent Mucaporus from adoring his one God, in secret if necessary, whether at Tempyra or Ostia or anywhere between the frontiers of the Empire and those of his trade as a soldier? He has left everything in order to settle here, in this inhospitable wilderness, so that he will not be forced to kill men and can feel himself 'master of his days and nights'. What does that mean, exactly? The Empire prevented him from doing it; but are these Getae any freer to dispose of their time as they like? And then our gods, too, assure us of eternal life. Can it be that here one manages to feel *a man* more than one does under the protection of Jupiter and Augustus? Not to kill, to be free, to have the certainty of eternal life—I think that no religion, not even that of Zamolxis, assures its votaries of such rights, rights which no law or cult speaks of with any precision. Or else there are secrets here which no one has yet been willing to reveal to me. But I feel at the same time that this is merely an illusion and that everything that is happening around me, and this migration of 'deserters', is only an expectation, without name or countenance. I am going to reread Virgil, who had had certain presentiments. The Empire is expanding in order to give place to something else, something greater and better. What is happening in the world at this moment is the preparation for a new metamorphosis of man (the word came to me of itself, unpremeditated). And there are among us beings who hear it coming, like a distant flood, and are preparing to receive it. They choose Zamolxis or Isis, in order to be nearer the healing waters that will bring us the solution, or the God whom we all await, without knowing it.

When immediately after dinner the sun disappeared beyond the lake and there remained of the *malana* no more

than a morsel that was thrown to the dogs, and of the fire no more than a few embers almost hidden by the ash, Mucaporus got up and said:

‘Will you come fishing with me? We shall return tomorrow, at dawn. The sea is calm. You will get to know all the saltwater fishes and if you are tired you can lie in the bottom of the boat and sleep.’

My first thought was this: ‘Dokia has given him Augustus’s instructions, by way of Honorius. He is taking me to sea to get rid of me.’ But I accepted. I preferred Mucaporus’s boat to his cottage and I felt confidence in him and in Dokia and Honorius. Had not my host come here simply in order to escape from killing men? So I took my place in the boat behind Mucaporus, while three other fishermen pushed it down the sands into the sea. Crouching low in my *penula* I was not afraid of the breeze that had sprung up from landward. The water was very calm, shining like a long sword in the light of the moon which rose from the sea immediately after we started: a red moon, straight ahead, larger than any moon I remembered. We rowed for some distance, then shipped the oars and let out the nets. I could see the horizon in front and, when I turned round, the shore with the village-fires winking faintly in the distance, and to the south the sharp, steady glow of the lighthouse at Tomis. The hours passed quickly, and I felt no fatigue. The water was so clear that I could see the fishes struggling in the net like silvery streaks before they came to the surface. The boat was soon filled with their wriggling multitude, and from time to time Mucaporus would point them out to me: ‘There are the little mackerel, those with black backs are red gurnards, that is the rare helops¹ and there you see fierce xiphias² whose attack is hard and sharp as a sword-thrust. Then there is the pilot-fish that follows in the wake of ships, and the shining hermit-crab . . .’ And many others. He also told me that out in the open sea were other kinds of fish and quite near inshore, entirely different ones. Each

¹ Identity uncertain. Possibly the sturgeon (Translator).

² The swordfish.

part of the sea harbours new species. 'And there are certainly, in the great deeps which no one has visited, fishes unknown to man, monsters that sometimes rise to the surface to frighten mariners.' These words struck me. The land and the sea, perhaps the sky too, harbour many secrets. So does man. Like these fathomless waters which our nets cannot reach, we preserve in ourselves secrets splendid or terrible. What net will be able to drag them from us? Shall we be better or worse when we know ourselves through and through? The theme of a new poem suddenly sprang to mind and these verses took shape within me:

*Descriptis sedes varie Natura profundi
Nec cunctos una voluit consistere piscis.*¹

As we returned shorewards I had the following dream. I thought I was in the same boat but absolutely alone; I was not moving along the surface but deep underwater, like a fish. This seemed natural, as I was entirely at ease. The boat moved of itself, propelled by some current or invisible force. I could not see the bottom which was deep in shadow nor the surface from which a pleasant blue light filtered down. I could on the other hand distinguish vague forms moving about me, other boats no doubt or unknown beings, strange animals that dared not come closer. I focused my attention on the boat's movement and strained my eyes to discern something in the distance. My voyage had a goal, of this I was sure, but I knew not what it was. The solitude did not frighten me. Suddenly a ray of light like a sunbeam illuminated the water in front of me, and in this unexpected light I saw a fish swimming in the same direction. It was a rather small, ordinary-looking fish, but not belonging to any known species. It had no exact colour and no sign to distinguish it from the others; but my senses, more delicate than any power of judgment, told me that it was *the fish*, a being that represented all the fishes, the primitive symbol

¹ 'Nature has established regions of varied depth, and has not wished that every fish should frequent the same' (*Halicutica*, verses 91-92).

of the species or of life in general. It moved, it lived, and yet it was like a drawing, made with a single stroke, as if someone had sketched it against the background of blue water and as if this sketch had come to life. I knew also that the fish represented something that interested me abnormally, but as I was not under the sway of reason, I did not try to understand. I followed it and great happiness filled me. This shape that swam gently forward, lit by the ray from above, was guiding me towards the goal of which a moment before I had been ignorant but which was now clear and known, without this knowledge being present or visible. I had found a road which I had sought in vain all my life long. All the other vague shapes that surrounded me were moving in the same direction. We mounted gently towards the surface, but I knew that this was not the surface of the sea and that what we should find up there would not be air or wind or life and its everyday aspects. Then suddenly a shadow took shape in front of me and of the fish. It was as if someone were up there and as if the shadow of his body, projected by the sun or by the unknown light above, had preserved its outline deep in the water. The shadow was that of a man and as I advanced towards it I realized that it consisted of a light more intense than that of the ray and the light surrounding me. This light made its own consistency. I said to myself: 'Here I am, here at last, at the end of my long journey.' And I made ready to disembark as if this shadow, I mean this light, were a port where I should find everything. I had hitherto sought in vain. But suddenly there was a tremor. The fish vanished into the light whose shape was the shape of a man. I said: 'My boat has reached the shore.' This was true, but it was the real boat, in which I had fallen asleep, and the real shore. The fishing was over.

The women and children of the village were sleeping, and the fires had gone out. The smooth grey surface of the sea gave off metallic gleams under a vast cloudless sky, where Helios was now preparing to run his course. Although tired, I did not follow Mucaporus who invited me into his hut, but wrapped myself in my *penula* and lay on the sand,

awaiting the sunrise. The dream was still vivid and I tried to decipher it while my eyelids began to close of themselves. Then I sank into slumber, with a vision of fishermen who were collecting baskets of silvery fish from their boats and carrying them up the beach. Some of the fish slipped out and fell back into the water, others fell on the sand where they struggled to reach the waves before dying. But these were well-known fishes and Mucaporus had told me their names.

* * *

This story concludes my chronicle for last year. Nothing new has happened since then. I dispatch letters to Rome to implore the Emperor's pardon by the intermediary of friends whose faces have become blurred with time. I receive useless letters which all tell me the same thing. This is what my friends, who are kind enough to write, must be saying to themselves: 'Poor Ovid, we mustn't let him die, all the same, straight away. It would be too cruel. What keeps him alive is the hope of returning. Let us encourage this hope, since it costs us nothing.' No one suspects the change that has taken place in me, nor my discoveries, nor what my real life is. How can I answer them, so as not to spoil their feeling of magnanimity, except by saying that I am very uncomfortable at Tomis, that I am bored, afraid of the barbarians and eager to return at any cost? They would think me mad if I told them the opposite of all that. But is the opposite true? I doubt it. Three years have passed since my arrival. A gulf has opened between me and my past, between me and Rome. But what do I desire, what do I hope, what do I expect of all that surrounds me? I could not say. I await something that makes me hope.

Artemis and Lydia pay me a visit from time to time and I have not the strength to turn them out. And then it is by them that I can judge of my age. Their visits give me optimism; they help me not to forget and also to forget. Not to forget my past, for they always ask me to tell them of what I used to do in Rome, of how Roman women dressed,

of how the public spectacles were organised—the *munera* and chariot-races—of what Corinna was like and what were the secrets of her art of love. To forget, because my unhappiness increases day by day, like an evil seed whose growth will prove fatal. I have lost everything and as yet found nothing. In reality and in dream I seek a response to my anguish which grows greater as the years pass by. Shall I have enough time before me for that response to be made intelligible?

Dokia has planted flowers in front of my window, in the middle of the little court that separates my house from the ramparts. The weather is good. In May I think of Rome with more pleasure than at any other season. The flowers remind me of Gaia and her shop full of sweet-smelling blossoms, and also of Corinna who used to accompany me in long walks on the Appian Way, between meadows bright with all the colours and rich with all the scents of the Italian spring. The sun was setting beyond Rome, and the hills towards Tibur and Tusculum¹ were bathed in golden light. One evening when we were some distance from Rome and were seated on the grass by the roadside, Corinna rested her head on my knees and said to me, quite gently but in a quiet and desperate voice which I had never heard before: 'I don't love you. I don't love anyone.' I stroked her hair, gazing into the sky and trying to think of some way of consoling her or finding an explanation of her trouble. But I found none. The light all round us admitted of no falsehood. And whom did I love, I, the author of the *Art of Love*? And whom have I loved since then? Love was but a word devoid of meaning: no one loved anyone in that vast city where, very soon, the streetlamps and lights of feasting and pleasure would be kindled. We were alone and we tried to forget it, overcome with wine and caresses. Orgies are made for that, as is fatigue for the poor man and the slave. We made our way back towards Rome, silent and hand in hand, both of us frightened by what Corinna had just said, and yet calmed by this truth which no one had yet had the courage to pronounce, and wishing at the same time to escape from the clear vision that op-

¹ Tivoli and Frascati.

pressed us. Corinna confessed to me some weeks later that she worshipped Isis and that she withdrew into the temple every month to offer up prayers and accomplish rituals which she never described to me. On those days I remained alone, truly alone, and I too sought a temple, a worship, anything that would enable me to believe in something and endure my solitude. But I found nothing. I wrote a great deal, but my verses brought me only fame.

* * *

It is very late and perfectly quiet, but, tired though I am, I cannot sleep and so I am writing. For two days now I have been at Histria as the guest of Dionisodor and his wife. I have always liked travel, my health is good and Tomis was boring. Herimon had introduced to me Pausanias, a ship-owner of his acquaintance, whose vessel was on her way from Greece to Histria. He at once invited me to come with him and I agreed. Honorius offered no objection, since he knows that I do not intend to escape. The voyage took only a few hours.

Histria is a handsome and wealthy place, larger than Tomis and built on a rocky peninsula deep in a gulf overlooked by low hills. The city itself is surrounded by high stone walls, and the main gate is defended by four towers, two on the outside and two inside. Dionisodor is a well-to-do merchant but also a man of culture with a fine library containing the principal Greek poets. Here I found the works of Menander, who lived in Athens four hundred years ago but who came from the land of the Getae and used to boast of his barbarian forbears. He said he was descended from the Daos or Getas, which are the names we now give to the Getae; or, to be exact, it is the Greeks who call them Getae whereas in Rome they are more often referred to as Dacians. In Athens the names of Daos and Getas had become synonymous with the word slave because nearly all the slaves in the time of Menander came from this region. The slave-trade still flourishes at Histria and is indeed one of the sources of my

host's wealth. Here the Greeks purchased corn, furs, able-bodied men as labourers, and fine women, who, according to Menander, were of easy morals in his time. Menander says that a Gete was not satisfied with his married life until he had at least ten legitimate wives: these Getae or Dacians were in fact polygamous. It seems that one of their kings, frightened like Augustus by the immorality of his subjects, had introduced very severe reforms. One of the most celebrated of his enactments was to compel the Dacians to destroy the vineyards all over the country in order to suppress the national vice of excessive drinking. The Dacians obeyed without a murmur and the vine disappeared from the hill-sides and wine from the cellars. The greatness of the kingdom dated from this moment. In Rome, on the other hand, no one has taken Augustus's enactments at all seriously. The explanation is simple. The king of Dacia was supported by religion and the Dacians were and remain more religious than vicious. One thing however strikes me as very curious: it was the Dacian kings themselves who supplied the Greek traders with slaves and these slaves never opposed their fate. Whence I conclude either that in allowing themselves to be sold these slaves sacrificed their freedom in the general interest or that they found themselves better off as slaves in Greece than as free men in Dacia.

Histria, according to Dionisodor, was founded by the Milesians more than six hundred years ago, that is, a hundred years after the foundation of Rome. They founded the port of Olbia, further north, at the same time. Other Greek cities were established on this coast at Kallatys, Tomis and Dionysopolis. The story of these trading posts planted by the adventurous Achaeans in barbarian territory, is fascinating. I am here simply recording what Dionisodor tells me. In the fourth century *Ab Urbe Condita*,¹ Histria, Tomis and Kallatys (this last lying south of Tomis) formed part of a pentapolis,² a coalition which later became an hexapolis owing to

¹ The foundation of Rome took place in 753 B.C. Following the Roman chronology, our year 1960 would be 2713 *ab Urbe Condita*.

² Why a pentapolis is obscure. The fifth city is not named (Translator).

the adhesion of Messabria. Kallatys was the centre of this alliance but after an unsuccessful war with Byzantium, Histria and Tomis acquired the ascendancy. During the period of decadence that followed, the four Greek cities were subjugated by the Scythian kingdom that was established in this region and of which the barbarian kings (Acrosas, Charaspes, Kanitès, Sarias and Tanousa among others) worshipped Greek gods and coined money. This Scythian kingdom split up into a number of little independent states—which was always, owing to the influence of Greek political habits, the real political weakness of the region—which gradually melted away under the pressure of other Scythians from the east and north, and of the Sarmatians dispersed among the Getae, on both sides of the Danube. A hundred years ago it was the turn of Mithridates, king of Parthia (or Pontus) to subjugate these cities, to force them into alliance and involve them against Rome. But when Mithridates was vanquished by our legions, in 681 A.U.C., these cities became Roman protectorates. Peace was again broken by the Bastarnae, against whom Rome sent forces under Caius Antonius, a former consular colleague of Cicero's. He was beaten by the barbarians near Histria and in the mêlée lost the ensigns of his legions. Later, in 724, Augustus sent Marcus Licinius Crassus, who crossed the Danube, pushed much further into the heart of Scythia and re-established order. Crassus received a triumph on his return to Rome, on 4 July, 726, as I clearly remember. But anarchy broke out anew after his departure from Dacia.

In relating the story of his city Dionisodor left out an episode that embarrassed him, though it was no more flattering to Rome than to himself. The battle near Histria between Caius Antonius and the Bastarnae took place in 692, and the allies of the barbarians were the Greeks of the free cities on the Black Sea. Exasperated by the taxes and the administrative abuses of C. Antonius Hybrida, proconsul of Macedonia, whose authority extended as far as Histria, they had called the Bastarnae to their aid and together they crushed the Roman forces. It was Burebista, king of the Dacians, who

took advantage of the Roman defeat in order to bring all the Greek cities under his control. He was the reforming king of whom I spoke above. But Burebista was assassinated in 713 and his kingdom disintegrated. The Getic kinglets south of the Danube, I mean in all the country between the Danube and the sea which used to be called Little Scythia—although there have been no Scythians there for very many years—were dethroned by Crassus. He then colonized the depopulated districts with Bessae from Thrace and set in authority over this new state a certain Rolès, a Getic king who had recognized the suzerainty of Rome. But this arrangement was no more successful than the earlier ones. Augustus next created the Odrysian kingdom of Thrace within the frontiers that bounded it five centuries ago, and to this, in 747, he added the cities and territory of Little Scythia. In principle the situation has not changed since then, but in fact we do not control this region which is invaded every year by the free Getae and the Sarmatians. It is only the Greek coastal towns that recognize our suzerainty, because Greece herself is subject to us. At the same time the Greeks rely more and more on our navy, and there is already talk in Rome of establishing a military command in this region with the object of protecting Roman shipping on the lower Danube. It is clear that the Greeks, whose fishing-rights in the waters of the Danubian Delta are founded on a direct concession from Augustus (the Istrians enjoy this privilege on the southern mouth of the Danube, which is called Peuké), will be the first to benefit from these measures. They will be able to pursue and extend their trade under the shelter of our warships. For the moment however it is a question of holding off, as far as possible, the Getic incursions; and Dionisodor inclines rather to a compromise solution of the difficulty. He thinks it possible to devise a formula for co-existence between the Romans and the Dacian kings, because we may be in mutual need of each other's help. But he also thinks that the Greeks will be the ones to profit from the arrangement, since war is the principal enemy of their commerce.

All this needs reflection. One must avoid war, no doubt, but who can convince the Getae that our intentions are peaceful and also persuade the Romans that the Getae do not intend to attack Rome? The truth is that we fear each other. We Romans are advancing everywhere in order to ensure a peace that escapes between our fingers, while the barbarians attack us from all sides in order to prevent our advancing. It is a vicious circle, from which there is no issue.

I have been walking through the streets of Histria. No one speaks our language. Trade is conducted in Getic and the citizens speak Greek among themselves; but their language contains many barbarian words and from this mixture there will no doubt arise a new tongue, which the Greeks of Athens will find it hard to understand. I am here on the frontier of a new world, whose future is unforeseeable. Dionisodor, who has often accompanied me on my strolls, told me that the Getae are very numerous, the most numerous of all peoples after the Indians, according to Herodotus whom he was always quoting. He said that if they were united under an intelligent and enterprising leader, they would give us a great deal of trouble. When Burebista was at the zenith of his power, his kingdom extended from the eastern limits of the German country to well beyond the mouth of the Danube.

I was alone yesterday in the principal square, as Dionisodor was busy. I had just emerged from the temple of Apollo, a large and splendid edifice in which I had been admiring some fine marble statues from Greece. While descending the steps, I noticed two men seated on a stone and apparently concluding some bargain. One of them was a Greek, the other's clothing proved him to be Dacian. Just as I was passing close by them and raising my toga so as not to brush the barbarian's shoulders, the latter took out a large multi-coloured handkerchief, untied the knot he had made in it and, as agreement had been reached, turned out on the stone some Roman coins bearing the likeness of Augustus. I halted involuntarily. The Gete cast me a distrustful glance but I addressed him in his own tongue, and the conversation was immediately resumed. Both the strangers treated me with

great respect when they saw I was a Roman and my perfect command of Greek won the goodwill of the other trader. They invited me to drink with them and we seated ourselves at a table in front of the tavern. I wanted to know where these Roman coins came from, and the Dacian made no difficulties about telling me. In his village beyond the Danube (which the Dacians call Dunaris) there are several Romans married to local women. They raise corn over immense areas, rear cattle and produce vast quantities of honey. One of them had bought two pair of oxen from my informant. He had come to Histria with the proceeds in order to procure valuable fabrics, jewels and such metal objects as a sword, a number of knives and two silver goblets. He told me the name of his Roman friend, which is Flavius Capito. The Getic town nearest his village is Troesmis. I inquired where he was lodging at Histria and asked him to take a message to my countryman. He agreed, we separated on friendly terms and today I gave him a letter for Flavius Capito. It was quite short. After greeting him, I briefly mentioned the reason for my presence at Tomis, wished him good luck in his new life and said that I did not expect a reply. He must be in the same situation as Mucaporus, that is, a deserter from the army like all the other Romans who have abandoned the Empire in order to dispose freely of their days and nights, and not to have to kill.

This encounter has been deeply disturbing.

* * *

We are at the end of May and the weather is beautiful. Yesterday we went out to the cemetery to attend the celebration of the Rosalia, a ritual of Roman origin which has been very popular at Histria for some years past. The cemetery is on the summit of a hill from which one looks down on the blue-green waters of the gulf, the ramparts and roofs of the city and, to the east, the green, undulating plain. Dionisodor and his family poured wine on the tombs of their ancestors, following the ancient custom. Then, in presence of the civic authorities, a marble column was unveiled, bearing a Greek inscrip-

tion in which the citizens of Histria rendered thanks to the gods and to Augustus for the peace and well-being that had been lavished on them during the past year. I counted a dozen of these columns, and I know there were others: one is erected every year. Dionisodor, in agreement with the city council, did me the honour of asking me to deliver a eulogy of Augustus. It was impossible to refuse; and so, in face of an alien sea and barbarian lands hostile to Rome and the Empire, I spoke of the exploits of Augustus, of his paternal kindness and the benefits he had conferred on his contemporaries. And I did it without repugnance, animated by the same feelings I had experienced last year, during the siege of Tomis. I felt myself the representative of a great protecting power, in the presence of men who owe us their tranquillity and their happiness. What would Dokia and Mucaporus have thought of me, had they been there? I let myself be carried away by the flow of words and a sensation of pride and certainty which does not possess me as a rule. I was an incarnation of Rome. Seen from so great a distance, everything was a symbol, even Augustus, and while speaking I could see him in the form of a statue, set in the midst of the great temple of the world to protect the weak and to give them hope. I spoke too of the bonds that unite Rome and Greece, and in the name of my compatriots expressed our gratitude for all that the Greeks had done, throughout their long history, for the good of mankind.

I am not used to making public speeches, but what I said was greeted with much enthusiasm. People certainly regarded me as a special envoy of Augustus, commissioned to gather information and to report to Rome the result of my secret inquiries. Dionisodor alone knew of my real status as an exile.

We next took our places round the tombs, after laying upon them bunches of roses in honour of the dead. The slaves had brought baskets full of the most exquisite viands. At the end of the meal a kind of tart made of boiled corn and honey was served, and the wine flowed abundantly. The company chanted songs, sad at the outset but growing more and more gay and worldly as the wine increased the distance between

the dead and the living. Someone was crying in a loud voice : 'The dead be with the dead, the living with the living.' This solemn banquet held in memory of the dear departed, of those who were never to return, was changing little by little into a eulogy of life. One of Dionisodor's slaves, a Getic girl from Noviodunum, was gazing at me through large blue eyes and, whenever she replenished my cup, made me a profound obeisance. We returned at the end of the afternoon, singing as we went. The streets and squares were crowded with citizens, some drunk, some very gay. They filled the taverns and stood in groups on the steps of temples and public buildings arguing and gesticulating in the Greek manner. Men-at-arms, whose business was to calm the passions which wine had unleashed on this day of pious observance, were walking, or rather staggering, in pairs through crowds of people who were continually inviting them to drink. But I saw no riots or bloodshed. Greeks as a rule never come to blows, despite the violent words they exchange in so bellicose a manner; they grow violent however when insulted by a stranger and especially by a Roman.

On returning to the house my host's family and the slaves immediately retired and before nightfall the air was loud with snoring. I bathed my eyes and then left my room. The blue-eyed slave-girl was seated on a bench in front of the house-door. She smiled and made a place for me beside her, on the still warm stone of the seat. The sun had set but the bland air was scented with roses as it is in Rome at the end of May, air in which the body moves with an ease and pleasure that put man in harmony with all around him. I had never, since leaving Rome, experienced such blandness in the air: it lent wings to every movement and left almost visible traces in the dusk, as if one were gliding over a quiet, enchanted pool.

'Your name is not Geta, by any chance?' I asked the young woman, thinking of the name that Menander used to give to all the female slaves in Athens. She nodded. 'What are you doing here at this hour?' She shrugged a bare shoulder, as much as to say: 'Nothing,' and continued to smile and look at me, swaying her feet to the rhythm of a song she was

humming. 'Will you come with me?' I suggested. 'We'll go down to the sea and find some quiet spot and you will sing me that song.' She jumped up and took my hand.

We traversed the city, still buzzing with the cries of the populace, and made our way down to the harbour. Here Geta made me climb into a boat and taking the oars steered towards a beach outside the walls. The reddish afterglow shone over the calm waters. Fishes were leaping, attracted by the unknown element above them, and falling back into the sea with musical splashings. The hum of the city grew faint behind us and I could see a few lights appearing in windows, further and further away. We set foot on the beach, Geta again held out her hand, and guided me to a hill at the foot of which the smooth sand was still warm. The air smelled of seaweed. We stretched ourselves on the sand and Geta began a song I had never yet heard. It was about a shepherd, the friend of a little ewe who used to come and announce his approaching death. The other shepherds wanted to kill her, but he himself thanked his little friend and asked her to tell his old mother that she must not weep over his tomb; for Death was his bride and he loved Death with a great love. The stars, the fir trees and the faithful dogs would henceforth be witnesses of his coming nuptials and future happiness.

'Where did you learn that song?'

'It's an old song of ours,' she answered, and then: 'People are afraid of death, in Rome, aren't they? We are not afraid of it. I am told that you love only love. But what is love without death? A passing thing, like a star that shines and then goes out.'

I answered with a smile: 'Will you die with me?' She too smiled, bent over and kissed me. I closed my eyes, but I could still see the smile which entered into me and illuminated me like a torch.

We returned very late. Fires were sinking low in the public squares and from our boat I could just see the façades of the temples in the wavering light of the dying flames. Everything was calm. The drunkards were asleep. A soldier of the

guard stopped us as we entered the port, then let us pass on. Geta took my hand to guide me through the darkness which smelled of smoke and wine. The Rosalia were over. By the door of my room Geta once more embraced me and took leave with the only Latin word she knew. 'Amor,' she said and moved off to the slaves' quarters. I replied 'Amor,' as if this word had meant 'Adieu'. And a picture of the Dacian shepherd and the little ewe rose up before me and remained with me while I slept.

* * *

I am writing this on the boat which is taking me back home: I mean to Tomis, for I have no other home. I can make out the low coast-line of the Black Sea, this time to my right, as if I were returning to Rome after three years of exile. One has this shore on the right only when returning, and it becomes a kind of left bank for those who are departing from civilization, for the mariners for example who fare toward Tauris and the Golden Fleece. What ages have passed since those days! Rome did not exist when the Greeks gave a name to these waters and planted flourishing cities on their shores. I count the waves. The tenth wave is always the strongest. 'Posterior nono est undecimoque prior'—I recall the second elegy of the *Tristia* which I composed when tossing on another sea while another vessel, driven madly before the tempest, was bearing me into exile. The tenth wave, again. This memory fills me with terror and disgust. I had left everything and I had no hope. Behind me lay everything I had lost; before me, the menace of the sea, with that tenth wave that would make the boat shudder and groan with pain like a human body, flogged by an invisible hand. Tomis was then for me synonymous with death. But now I can think with pleasure of Tomis as my own city. I can think of my house and friends, of those I have left at Histria, of Flavius Capito, founder of a new race, of Geta the Dacian girl, and of Dionisodor and his family. In a few hours now, at the southern end of the beach, between the sea and the lagoon, I

shall see Mucaporus's cabin among the poor cabins of the other fishermen. Friends, women who love me or whom I think I love, await me on this coast that has ceased to be hostile. What is life, if not love and friendship? These shores endure me, therefore they must love me.

Dionisodor made me a present of two *lecythi*, little clay vases that are used here in the service of the dead, and laid in the tomb beside the body. One is red with black figures represented on it; the other is black as it emerged from the oven and the figures are in red, the natural colour of the clay as it remains under the enamel. I shall place them on the sill of my window, overlooking the garden. Something strange is happening as I look at these *lecythi* or, with closed eyes, imagine them on my window-sill. Instead of recalling Dionisodor these sacred vases remind me of Geta. One of the women figured in red on the black vase is like her; and on the red background of the other vase, a small black ewe stretches her neck towards a shepherd as if she were speaking to him and he were listening attentively. It is Geta and the story of the little ewe that these vases will bring back to me as long as I have them, for years ahead. The song ran like this:

The stalwart oak and lofty pine
Shall be thy escort on the way:
A thousand stars shall duly shine
As torches for thy bridal day.

I think I am improvizing a little; but I perfectly remember the rhythm and the idea. 'Will escort thee on thy bridal day'—that is what the ewe said to the shepherd. While the stars, shining in the firmament, will be like torches standing by a road to light the bridal couple on their way: the shepherd and Death, of whom the bridegroom had no fear. 'What is love without death?'

What splendour in these verses which simply express the Dacian conception of death! Death is the shepherd's bride and not his terror. And Nature with her most brilliant treasures accompanied him in his joy, which shall be eternal.

Nowhere, not even among the Greeks, have I encountered poetical beauty so simple and profound. This shepherd exists. He wanders with his flocks where Flavius Capito has elected to live, beyond the Danube, in the land where Zamolxis had preached to his people. But no. What is the good of thinking of it? I am too old to begin all over again. But if Flavius Capito answers my letter, if he says: 'Come and see,' I shall not resist the call. And really, I have already been to see. I have seen Mucaporus in his contented poverty. Flavius is a rich man and even so he is happy; otherwise he would not have stayed there. What is happening in these men? At what exact moment in the past did they say to themselves: 'This is done with. I shall make a new start'. And they choose the Dacian country. Why not some other land? It is true that among the Germans or the Parthians they would be slain at once, or else compelled to worship other gods, like ours, or to serve other military leaders, more cruel than Augustus's generals. Whereas in Dacia they are free. Zamolxis is their own choice and not a god imposed on them. They also choose their fields and their wives. Such must be the felicity of the gods. And there are many other men like Flavius and Mucaporus. 'Hundreds,' I was told by the Dacian I met in Histria, 'hundreds in the villages north of the Danube and beyond the mountains, in what was once the land of the Agatyrseae, where the streams roll grains of gold among the pebbles. Others are founding new villages and settling on virgin soil where they grow the first corn ever grown there. Others push their way into the great forests of the north-east, among the wild Dacians, where the spruce-woods are very sombre and the aurochs make the clearings tremble under their hoofs.'

And these men are perhaps Romans whom I have met in the Forum or the circus or in the street, men like myself whom no one has compelled to come into exile, to this land which I do not yet understand but no longer detest.

And supposing, on my return to Tomis, I found a letter announcing the end of my exile? 'The Emperor, in his bounty . . . '—which of these two liberties should I choose? Unfortunately, I am still Ovid. Unfortunately, there is no

letter from Rome. Life is simpler than one thinks. The great dilemmas in face of the enigma of destiny, all such belong to the tragic stage.

The vessel at this moment is sailing some way off-shore. I can see the lagoon glittering beyond the sandy beach and some black dots which might be the huts of my friends. They must all be busy with their afternoon task, preparing the boats and nets for the evening departure. It was here, on these waters, that I had that strange dream.

FOURTH YEAR



Winter separates me from everything. The cold frightens me, and once again I become what I have always been. I dream, and once again I begin to write. Letters, always letters. Being weary of the *Tristia* I have begun a new book which I shall call *Pontica*, as a poor homage to my place of exile. The subject is the same because nothing has changed. Augustus is unwilling to pardon me. And so I return to the charge with the same arguments. The friends to whom I send these mis-sives will busy themselves to obtain my pardon: they will be my ambassadors. To Brutus I wrote: 'Besides, though its title suggests no feeling of sadness, you will see that this work is no less sad than the one I last published. It is the same subject with a different title.' All the same, there is a tactical difference. This time I make no secret of the persons to whom the poems are addressed. Years have gone by, and the friends of the forgotten exile are no longer in peril. That part of myself which has not yet been altered by dwelling in Tomis and which in the winter months trembles, regrets, implores and dreams, pursues the vain efforts of the *Tristia*. Under the spell of this terror—which however will dissolve beneath the first warm rays of spring—I wrote a letter to Cotys,¹ king of the Thracians and son of Rhœmetalcès, whose dominions, which are subject to Rome, extend to the mouth of the Danube. I begged him to have pity on me, for he too is a poet and writes as well in Greek as in Latin. I really made no claim on him, but

¹ Cotys was to be killed five years later by Rhaiscuporis who wanted to unite the whole of Thrace under his rule—an act that was to provoke a violent reaction on the part of Tiberius, Augustus's successor.

I wrote in one of those phases of melancholy which cause me to lose my head. I did not ask him to make me a court poet, but he could have interpreted my letter in that sense. Had he extended his confidence to me, I should have changed my dwelling and quitted Tomis. Cotys answered my letter. He is polite, intelligent, cultured and, like all princes who have been conquered, very cunning although very young. He paid me a thousand compliments, cited dozens of my verses but extended no invitation. He is too much afraid of Augustus. I am the great poet, but Augustus is his master and it is to the legions and not to my poems that he owes his throne. My friends in Rome are no braver than he.

This is a fine day. The snow glitters under the sunlight as though sprinkled with diamonds, and the branches are weighed down by these frozen flowers. The fire never goes out in my hearth and will burn for several months ahead. But it is in winter that I have grown old. To live on memories as I do in this period of the year is to deprive oneself of life and to use up one's reserves, instead of expanding right and left in new acts and deeds. Heroes grow old very late, because they are perpetually acting and producing events. Their old age is short-lived and they collapse of a sudden, under the weight of memories. I wrote as follows to my wife: 'Here is the decline of life, powdering my hair with snow, while my brow is furrowed with wrinkles. My body shakes and trembles, strength and vitality are passing away and the games that amused me when young amuse me no more. Were you unexpectedly to see me, you would not recognize the ruin of my former self.'

But have I really changed so much? My letters are full of these exaggerations. All the colours I paint must be sombre so that my wife and friends may have pity on me and do their best to save me. If I could decide my own lot, I should pass the winters in Rome and the other seasons here, as I have still much to learn about these terrible shores, whereas I know Rome by heart. It is only the cold that scares me and I have no efficient weapon to fight it off. I grow old under its sting and relapse into the world of memory; lying prone practically the

whole winter, I become sick with thinking of my weakness. Changes of weather affect all my feelings and the physical pain that gnaws at me flows desperately into my letters. If it were not for Dokia, I should be crying aloud with rage and boredom. On days of snow or tempest or biting frost, she remains with me by the fire and I tell her the story of my life. We love each other, without ever touching each other or pronouncing the word. I feel that she finds my presence indispensable. When she says: 'Come here, "Augustus",' the dog quivers as she strokes him, but I know that under his thick fur she is seeking me. Thus she dwells in beauty, invulnerable, protected by her own secrets, happy when with the man who must not know her innermost thoughts, unhappy perchance in the company of him who knows her and enjoys her love. Whom does she pass her nights with? I have never tried to find out, but I am sure that she does not always sleep in the same house as her father and daughter. Her eyes and face often betray her. She also guesses my feelings. But we never touch on the subject of love. We love each other, and this makes me think of two flowers growing on separate trees. They would fain be together, but only their wordless hues and distant scents can touch, amid all the stupidity and indifference of the world.



Dreams also age me. I was describing this a few days ago to Fabius Maximus, in the second epistle of my *Pontica*: 'Terrified as I am by dreams which repeat my real misfortunes, my faculties seem doomed to remain awake and torment me. Now I suppose myself trying to dodge the arrows of the Sarmatians, now I yield my wrists to the cruel cords that will bind them. Yet at other times the lying dream offers me sweeter images and I think I see again the roof I left at home.'

I see myself pierced by the arrows of the Sarmatians or else, with wrists bound together and tied to one of their horses, tottering over the plain, parched with thirst and shattered with fatigue—a slave of the barbarians. At other times the dream takes me to Rome and I pass quiet hours in the shadow

of my trees, surrounded by my family. These images often follow one another in the course of the same night. I awake, crying in agony under the whiplash of some barbarian, my heart beating as if it would break. 'Augustus' begins to bark and I have to shout to make him stop; and I remain trembling under the spell of the nightmare. I fall asleep after a time and am visited now by the happy dream: once again I am strolling in my garden. But the least noise puts an end to this unreal felicity. What I mean is that such a night is longer and harder to endure than ten ordinary days, because it exhausts body and soul, and brings me little rest. Rest I find in the company of real beings, especially of Dokia whose gaze makes me nearly weep for happiness. Other joys, slighter in themselves but pleasant and consoling, also enable me to forget the emotions of the night. Herimon sometimes pays a visit, to relate the joys of his love-affair and the woes of his conjugal life. The poor fat creature is to be pitied. Lydia comes too from time to time, to pass the evening and each time to take away her little present. She is greedy for sweet things, such as a cup of Chian wine, and she adores imitation jewels and caresses—anything to eat or to give her a thrill. 'When I see the red, glowing light in this precious stone,' she says, 'I feel I am queen of a far-off city. I forget my real existence. This cup of wine makes me dream of things I have never possessed and never shall possess but which are mine at the moment when the cup touches my lips. When your hand rests on my shoulder, I become Caesar's wife.' She comes to see me so that I may cause her to dream and I like her presence because it banishes my dreams. We are contrasting beings who attract each other and help each other to live.

Honorius visits me, too, but for some time now his visits have been rare, and he is more and more silent and morose. His is not a quiet conscience; or else he is in love and jealous; or else he meditates doing me a bad turn. The man has always inspired my liking and at the same time scared me as if, with his silent problems, he were a wall suddenly raised between me and the rest of the world, a wall that prevents my seeing the future.

But I have forgotten to record the latest news. Tomis has lost its favourite daughter: Artemis left us last autumn. A young god has carried her off, by which I mean a corn-merchant from her own country, a wily and engaging old man. I met them one evening in the street, radiating bliss like a couple newly engaged. They are probably married by now. The old fellow had known Artemis's family in Byzantium; so the adventure she once described to me was true, or partly so, at any rate. They embarked for Samos, where this merchant's house is the centre of a vast and flourishing business. As she has accepted this old man as her husband, she must be happy: she certainly sees him in the likeness of Apollo. It is hard to say which of the two has been the luckier.

Darkness is already falling. What time can it be? I will call Dokia to make up the fire and prepare me a cup of mulled wine. 'Augustus' sleeps at my feet. Something is happening in his dreams, because he is whining like a child and beginning to tremble. He is probably dreaming of his namesake, so I will rouse him in order to stop the nightmare. The wind has dropped; but the night is dark and I can hear the snowflakes falling gently in the garden. They make no actual noise, but their fall increases the silence and this produces a sort of sound which I have learned to hear.

* * *

That night of falling snow is now far distant. I am sitting on a rock in the sun, over against the sea, and writing. I have long given up trying to understand the ways of destiny; but I cannot refrain from asking myself questions again and again. I was born at Sulmo, but glory awaited me in Rome. It is in Rome that I have spent the greater part of my life, but at Tomis that I am passing my old age, and here I shall probably die. Prophecies are to be avoided. Fate has taught me to distrust anything I can imagine about my future. Who would have thought that once relegated to Tomis, surrounded by barbarians, timid and unenterprising as I am, I should have set out to learn what the world really is—this world where I

am a prisoner and of which I have spoken so ill in my epistles.

A year ago I was at Histria, and that journey merely excited my desire to go and see what is happening further afield. Today I am at Leuké, or Achilleis as some call it, a rocky island facing the mouth of the Danube. Pausanias is my host, as he was last year. He is going to take me on to Troesmis, on the left bank of the Danube, where the stream makes a great bend and then flows seaward. From there I shall pursue my journey by other means.

Pausanias calls every year at Leuké to deliver wine and oil for the three priests who serve the temple of Achilles Pontarches, protector of Greek shipping and commerce in the Black Sea. The temple, which replaced an ancient sanctuary that the Milesians had erected, stood in the middle of the island and many ships used to put in to sacrifice to Achilles and bear offerings to his priests. But we found the temple in ruins and no sign of life anywhere. A tempest, or rather an earthquake, had shattered the marble columns, and this in turn had caused the walls to collapse. The god's statue lay prone on the ground, but undamaged. Pausanias and his men set it up—with an effort, as it is tall and heavy—and offered the appropriate sacrifices. There was no trace of the priests, their house having also collapsed. It seems likely that they abandoned the island during or just after the catastrophe. The only dwellers now in the priests' house are large black snakes, which prevented us from moving the blocks of stone to see if by chance the priests had been buried under the ruins and were still alive, because the catastrophe was quite recent, having occurred only two or three days ago. We called aloud and searched the island from end to end. Pausanias's men are still walking along the beach and I can hear their frightened cries mingled with the moaning of the sea. They fear the shades of the departed, they fear the snakes which are not poisonous though their shiny black scales give them a repulsive appearance; and they fear the eerie solitude. The sun is already well up in a cloudless sky and a cool breeze is whistling among the rocks. The appearance of the island with its shattered temple is scarcely inviting: one might call it the

Isle of the Dead or the Isle of Serpents. I am not afraid; on the contrary, a strange peace has come over me since I have contemplated these temple ruins. I felt certain at once that the god himself had fled with the priests, and even that he had withdrawn from the world. If the priests were dead—buried under fallen masonry—why should not the god have suffered a like fate? Is it possible for a god to die? Why should not a god, like so many other things, withdraw in face of the weary adoration of men? The gods die with the last of their worshippers, and it is likely that new gods are being born without our perceiving it. They await only a name in order to be worshipped.

It was to seek out the priests of Zamolxis that I left Tomis. Dokia and her father told me where they are to be found, and I am now making my way to their sacred mountain in order to become fully acquainted with the teaching of the Getic god. Could he perhaps be the nameless god whose invisible presence hovers over the Empire, causing the legionaries to desert and guiding the women to cults that are more spiritual and austere? I shall soon discover whether he is; but it is really impressive that, while on my way towards the one God, I should have come upon this ruined temple, these serpents coiled about the fallen statue of Achilles Pontarches, and this total solitude; and to have detected in myself the presentiment of an ending that awakens no regret in my heart.

At the foot of the cliffs I can see Pausanias's boat rocking on the waves. We shall embark by and by. This is the end of May—the month of Corinna, the month of flowers. There are no flowers on the rocks of Leuké. How far away are the days of Corinna! Another life, a life of exile, has already arisen between me and my past, like that wall in the dream that prevented me from gazing over Rome.

* * *

The boat is gliding between forests of willow-trees. Their drooping branches trail in the water which, as we row by, sways them as high as the tree-tops and frightens the birds

who are perched there. These strange birds, called pelicans, have a large beak with an oblong pouch under the lower bill, in which they carry fish for their young, as if they were returning from market. They have a heavy flight and when they settle on a bough, it bends low under their weight, especially if the pouch is full. We are following the lower arm of the Ister, the most southerly of the three channels through the Delta, and on account of the current we can only advance slowly by using the oars. We stop three times a day to enable the slaves to rest and recover breath. During one of these halts I went ashore in order to see what lay beyond the wall of willows. The site was in truth worthy of Virgil's genius. The land is not flat, as one might have supposed, but undulating and broken by little hills and valleys. The higher ground is tufted with trees and tall grasses, whereas the surface of the water which forms lakes on every side is covered at this season with water-lilies in flower. The water is so clear and calm that one can see the sandy bottom between the slim parallel lily-stems, which all bend gracefully with the current. The surface is quite white with petals whose purity contrasts with the rich green of the banks or the pale yellow of the sandy beaches that often form at the foot of a hill. Pelicans and thousands of other birds are flying over this paradise, and I have seen no trace of man's presence, although Histria has the monopoly of fishing-rights in this area which extends south of the Ister's delta, and although many fishermen visit the region throughout the season of good weather. The Greeks have given the name of Peuké to this southern channel.

We passed the night at Salsovia, a Getic town on the right bank of the river. Life here must be terrifyingly drab. For four or five months of the year the Ister is ice-bound, no one arrives from the outer world, and the inhabitants pass their time in drinking, or singing, or breaking holes in the ice to catch fish. Life in Tomis seems to me, by comparison, far more lively and sociable. Imagine if Augustus had exiled me to Salsovia, amid these waters that are either stagnant or for ever moving, amid these limitless woods, and these men clad in sheepskins and stinking of fish, far away from the Greeks and oh! how far

from Rome! . . . The place is surrounded with a double palisade filled with dry mud, and the house-walls are built in the same way, although the surface is whitewashed. I noticed some houses half-buried in the earth, with their thatched eaves touching the ground on both sides. To enter them you go down a few steps as if descending into a tomb. The men's beards which are fairly well groomed are rounded to follow the lines of the face. The women have large, sad, hopeless eyes that seem to gaze beyond the marshes that surround them as if in the distance they discerned another world less dreary than this and other men, maybe without beards. Their gaze reminded me of what I sometimes observed in Corinna when she was beginning to think and was unaware of my presence. What are all these women awaiting, here and in Rome and in fact everywhere? They are perhaps dreaming of the chaste and happy age of the Amazons who, after the act of love, used to kill their men; or perhaps of the other life that their God has promised them.

We continued our journey to Aegyssus or Aegyptos, which is just below the place where the Danube divides to form the Delta. One has hardly emerged from the Peuké before the vast expanses of the river become visible. Far away we can see the river-banks bordered with willows and beyond them again vast plains stretching northward, while to the south hills rise beyond hills. Pausanias tells me that the river has two names. The upper part, from the sources which are in the forests of Germany down as far as the Haemus, is called Dunaris or Danubius; the lower part, from the Haemus to the sea, is the Ister. It is the sacred river of the Getae and the Dacians who occupy its banks most of the way up. Their kingdom extended as far as Pannonia, before the coming of the Romans. When the Dacians go to war, they first drink of the Danube's waters which have the property of strengthening them and making them invincible.

We spent a whole day at Aegyptos, discharging a part of our cargo of wine and hardware, and taking on board skins, barrels of honey and three slaves. We could have unloaded and taken the goods in exchange on our return, but Pausanias

is a prudent man. One never knows what may happen; trading in these parts is always a hazard. Aegypsos is now under the domination of Cotys, king of the Thracians, but last year the Getae attacked and took it. There was much talk of this war at Tomis, I remember; and I myself have mentioned it in the *Pontica*:

Stat vetus urbs . . .
'By Ister's shore an ancient city stands
Whose lofty walls and site defend it well.'

And further on:

Urbs erat in summo nubibus aequa jugo.
'High on its hill it well-nigh touched the clouds.'

For some time therefore Aegypsos was held by the Getae who thought of using it as a base for their raids to the south, that is towards Tomis, Histria and the other Greek and Thracian towns, raids which they are in the habit of making either alone or in company with their Sarmatian allies. But Vitellius embarked a whole legion at Ratiaria on the Ister, whose waters already swarm with Roman war-vessels, and sailed down to Aegypsos where he joined the land army that had been dispatched by Cotys, our ally. Together they attacked the city. The Getae put up a desperate resistance, and the Roman army suffered heavy losses: but it was the attack directed by Vitellius in person that won us the final victory. (I have dedicated the seventh epistle of Book IV of the *Pontica* to Vitellius.) The fate of all these strongholds on the right bank of the river will be the same. They had been founded for the most part by the Scythians, who were later forced to retire eastward under the increasing pressure of the Getae. The latter took and modernized the towns in question, surrounded them with strong ramparts and tried to retain control of them; for whoever commands these points is master not only of the lands between the Ister and the sea but also of the territory to the east, north and west, because the right bank is higher and itself constitutes an immense natural ram-

part. It is therefore logical that once our legions are in Dacia all these cities should fall into our hands, as he who holds them becomes master of all the surrounding region. Alexander of Macedon and Lysimachus realized the strategic importance of these cities and did their utmost to subdue them, though without success. I doubt whether the Getae will accept the present position for long, and it seems likely that once they have recovered their strength, after last year's bloody defeat, they will return to the attack.

From the upper town, which is strongly defended, the eye ranges far over the river to the misty horizon. On the left bank of the Ister the plain is marshy and appears deserted, like a calm and limitless ocean. The right bank, by which Aegyptos stands, consists of a lofty and even mountainous plateau, whose wooded heights rise in successive waves towards the south: a landscape at once wild and majestic, like the bearing of its inhabitants.

As I do not intend to converse with my fellow countrymen I am wearing Greek dress on this journey. There is a Thracian garrison in the town but the real masters are the handful of Roman soldiers with their centurions who are directly responsible to the military command in Moesia. I often encounter them in the street and they look at me curiously, as I have the appearance of a smart and wealthy Greek whom no one would expect to meet among these wild backwoods; but they never address me. They all have the self-assured step and haughty stare of a victorious army, and when the Roman helmet with its aggressive plume appears at the end of an alley, the children take to flight. We are the strongest of the nations, which means that people everywhere are afraid of us. To inspire fear is the only visible reward of strength. If we manage one day to mingle our blood with the blood of this people, as we did formerly with the Sabines and the Etruscans, we shall cease to be regarded as enemies. But will that day ever come? We have, in the meantime, to make war, to kill, to get killed, to shed blood which will be carried down by the impersonal river to the supremely indifferent sea.

Everywhere one sees traces of the recent war: burnt out

houses, breaches in the walls, one tower in ruins; and in the streets, few civilians but many foreign soldiers in battle dress as though hostilities might start again at any moment. Pausanias and I lunched with the Histrian, Aristagoras, who has been living for the past ten years in Aegyptos where he too is engaged in commerce. He tells us that the Greeks have nothing to fear from the Getae or the Romans, but that their trading activities would profit from a definite Roman settlement in this region. When speaking of the principal tributaries of the Ister, he mentions the Pyretus, the Tiarantos and the Museos and relates a curious story. In the neighbouring district towards the vast eastern plains, beyond the Pyretus, the first big river flowing into the Euxine is the Tyras. On its banks, he says, is a great rock, well known in the region, on which you can see the gigantic footprint of Hercules, perfectly preserved. An argument immediately arose between Pausanias and Aristagoras regarding the origin of this sacred footprint. Pausanias maintains that the son of Jupiter and Alcmena left this mark on the stone after or during his fight with Diomed, king of the Thracians, whom he slew—an exploit which, if I am not mistaken, was his *seventh labour*. Aristagoras argues that Diomed and the Thracians lived further south and that Hercules could only have crossed the Tyras on his return from the Caucasus where he had gone to release Prometheus from his bonds. Like good Greeks, the two friends assailed each other with mighty eloquence, and finally sought my opinion. I said, out of politeness, that I was inclined to agree with Aristagoras, although at every point in the debate each had seemed to have the upper hand. Aristagoras relies on an argument which may well be sound. The Thracian kingdom never reached as far as the Tyras, and therefore according to him the fight between Hercules and Diomed took place somewhere between the Ister and the Haemus. Pausanias says it is absurd to suppose that Hercules returned from the Caucasus by the longer route which skirts the northern shores of the Black Sea, instead of taking the southern route which leads direct through Asia Minor to Greece.

As we move upstream to Noviodunum Pausanias is still trying to convince me. He pours me a drink but, as the boat is shaken by the waves, some of the wine spills on the table. Our vessel advances slowly into the red eye of the sunset. Here and there on a rugged knoll we see a tower or the sombre shadow of a wall or palisade. My friend's talk fails to interest me, and while I pretend to listen I am really thinking of Geta, Dionisodor's slave who comes from Noviodunum and whose pathetic farewell still echoes in my memory. 'Amor,' she murmured as she moved away into the shadows; and she repeated the word, which had suddenly become tragic as this was our last encounter. I do not even know whether Geta was her real name. To all my questions she would reply by nodding and laughing, and giving me to understand that it was she who yielded.



Sedida knew that I was coming and was already awaiting me. Her house, whitewashed like all Getic dwellings, stands outside the town on a hill from which you look down on Troesmis and the broad river and away over the unknown plains which I think of crossing tomorrow. I am still in Thracian and Roman country, since Troesmis last year suffered the same fate as Aegyptos. The city was taken by the Getae and recaptured by Vitellius and Cotys's Thracians.

'All this country is Getic,' Sedida told me as she indicated the surrounding landscape. She has been living alone for the past year, as her husband and son were killed when defending Troesmis against the Romans. Though she knows who I am, she received me under her roof and, following the local custom, offered me a cup of water and a spoonful of honey. I am a friend of her brother's daughter, Dokia, and that is enough. This woman on whom old age has begun to set its mark looks sad in the solitude of her fields and stables, for she has not forgotten her family; but she is not in despair. The Dacian religion teaches that all warriors who fall in battle enter at once into the eternal bliss of the heaven of Zamolxis;

and her menfolk fell in battle. When a Gete dies, especially in war, his passing is celebrated with a banquet. When a Gete is born, they weep over his entry into a world where he will surely suffer until Zamolxis has pity on him. I think there is deep wisdom in this belief, and I said so to Sedida. She looked at me with her hazel eyes, which are very calm and beautiful, and replied: 'Every religion is full of wisdom. Yours is too, probably.' She seemed to reflect and then, somewhat embarrassed by a thought which she dared not at once put into words, continued: 'There is something I do not understand. If your gods are wise and just, why have your people abandoned them?'

'What makes you think that?'

'A people that believes in its gods and respects their laws does not set out to conquer other peoples. It defends itself when attacked, or goes to war when driven mad with hunger, but it does not make war and conquest a rule of life. I hope I have not offended you.'

'No, Sedida, you have not offended me. What you say is just and you have spoken a great truth. My people have lost their faith. They are at present seeking a new God and war is perhaps a way of seeking him; but not, I recognize, the most just.'

'When I was still a small girl, more than thirty years ago, your people attacked our king Zyraxes, after conquering the lands of another Getic king named Dapvx. My father fought against the legions. He was among the soldiers sent by Zyraxes to assist Dapvx, and he has told me the whole story. He often spoke of it in winter. Our men, who had been vanquished on the plain, took refuge in the city of Dapvx, but the Romans immediately laid siege to it. Your general was Licinius Crassus, conqueror of the Bastarnae. The city could and would have resisted until winter, when frost and snow would have obliged the Romans to raise the siege; but there was a traitor among us. He made terms with Crassus in the very presence of our men, parleving with him in Greek from the wall. All our warriors could hear them talking but none of them except the traitor understood Greek. In the course of the

night, he opened one of the gates. Dapyx continued to fight in the streets, in the light of the flames that were devouring our houses; but the Romans were far more numerous. When all hope was lost, Dapyx killed himself, and all the chieftains followed his example; and so, when Licinius reached the king's house, he found him dead and with him the bodies of his family and of all the great nobles who had preferred death to servitude. During the latter part of the struggle the citizens had managed to flee with their most precious possessions by another gate and to escape in the darkness. Next day they reached the cave of Keiris which is near the sea, not far from Histria, and here they were all able to hide with their flocks and possessions, as the cave is vaster than a city. But Licinius Crassus gave them no respite. He made no attempt to enter the cave, but did what only a man who has lost faith in his gods could do: he had the mouth of the cave walled up; and all who were in it, men, women, children, old men and animals, perished after weeks of slow agony. No, my father was not there. He had fled the previous night, when the city fell into the hands of your people, and had carried the news of the defeat to Zyraxes. Forewarned of his peril by my father, our king took refuge within the walls of Genucla, a city that stands amid the many arms of the Ister, nearer the sea, in a country of swamps and forests. But Crassus attacked the place and took it by storm one night, killing many of our people. Crassus, my father told me, was in search of something at Genucla, and he found it—which explains his violence. You will remember that, thirty years earlier, the Getae had crushed a Roman army, led by Gaius Antonius if I am not mistaken, under the walls of Histria. We were then the allies of the Bastarnae, but it was our men who decided the victory and who carried off the Roman standards, which they deposited in the king's fortress at Genucla. It was there that Crassus came in search of them. And these troubles will never end; or they might perhaps end when your legions conquer the whole of our country; or else when our kings lead us to Rome as victors.'

'Do you think that possible?' I asked.

‘Anything is possible. We are a great people. We have one God and we believe in Him and in the laws He has given us. But what we still lack is one king. You have one king but too many gods. The advantage is still with us. I hope I have not offended you.’

Sedida has not yet grown accustomed to solitude. She likes talking and profits from my being here; but her stories do not weary me. She has intelligence, a good deal of knowledge and a marvellous memory. A dozen or so labourers look after her fields and flocks. The river at this point describes a loop under the hills on the right bank, and here stand Troesmis, Sedida’s house and some Getic villages subject to the Thracians and Romans. Beyond the river a green plain, dotted with trees, stretches to the horizon: this is the land of the free Dacians and here too one sees a few villages and flocks with their shepherds. For my journey Sedida has lent me a four-wheeled covered wagon, with two horses, and she asks for nothing in return. One of her men will come with me. My goal is Kogaionon, the sacred mountain of Dacia, on the top of which live the high priest and his monks. The journey will take three or four days, from what Sedida tells me, and on my return I shall certainly find some Greek or Roman galley to take me to Tomis. I am alone at the moment. The shrill song of the cicadas fills my room and the air is pervaded with their music which heralds the great heat of summer. The sky is cloudless. I can see a part of the river, with boats moored to the shore; on the right are verdant hills, and over the river the plain is covered with cornfields turning yellow in places. Talking with Sedida makes me think of the fate that is pursuing our people. Since the time of Julius Caesar the gods have been superseded by a single man, and the Empire has become the very image of this terrible metamorphosis. A man is our law-giver and the gods are dead; or else it is we who are dead and they still living. War thus becomes the symbol of death, and since the day when we lost faith in the gods we carry war and violence within us. The wars we wage everywhere are but proof of this moral disintegration. We carry death with us like an epidemic, and we call massacres ‘victories’ and

burials 'triumphs'. And nothing can be done to arrest the progress of the evil. There are few among us who could understand and be convinced; and, they would ask me in Rome, what good would it do to be convinced? Destroy our temples and worship Zamolxis, a barbarian god? Or else begin all over again, and believe in our gods with the ardent faith that possessed Aeneas and Numa Pompilius, and make peace with the rest of the world. But that is absurd. Rome is old. Would I not like to start life anew, to become young again and live in some other way, a life free from errors and attached to other ideals? But that too is impossible, as it is now impossible for Rome to return to the age of the kings who were loyal to their gods. Sedida nourishes illusions. The Dacian kings will never march to Rome; on the contrary, Rome will carry death even into the heart of their forests before collapsing herself, exhausted by her errors. And will the world then come to an end? No, something unexpected will happen, something that has already begun to happen, I don't know what or where, but the air is full of it, full of something that the most sensitive feel without knowing its name and which will restore to mankind the freshness of a new beginning. I cannot express the thing: it might be a new God, a new people, a new sun in the sky, or some other unknown thing; but I know that it will come. And I am here to try to learn whether the Getic sages, whose lives are so exemplary, can give me a sign, whether their teaching tells of this renewal now so near, and whether their prophets are already proclaiming the advent which I await but of which the name and the form are beyond my power to imagine.



After saluting Sedida who had accompanied me to the river bank, I crossed in a boat to where Comozous was waiting for me with the horses and wagon. The latter was equipped for a long journey, with weapons and provisions. We have been travelling since yesterday morning, first along the Museos and then beside a stream that empties into it. The trickle of

water is muddy and saline, and the horses do not like drinking it. This brook springs from a rock of salt and forms a tarn up among the mountains, which we shall see this evening in the distance.

The region we crossed yesterday is rather monotonous and contains few villages; it is, however, the only way one can follow from the Danube to the mountains. We passed the night at Zousidava, a large Dacian village, or small town, which serves as a *dépôt* for the native produce, which is then taken downstream to Dunaris and the sea, and thence shipped to Greece and elsewhere. Horses, corn and honey form the principal wealth of this Dacian territory. A little further north stands another town, Ramidava, according to my friend Comozous. *Dava*, in Getic, means both town and village. The *dava* ahead of us, but beyond the mountains, is said to be Komidava; and further west still flows the Agatirses, a stream rich in the gold from which the Dacians coin their money. This money consists of rings varying in size and thickness according to their value. I have about a hundred in the purse I carry under my tunic, securely hidden from prying eyes.

Comozous's conversation is that of a barbarian who speaks only his own language and knows no country but his own. He will not believe me, for example, when I tell him that our peasants at home speak Latin, because he cannot imagine the existence of any peasants but Dacians or any peasant language other than theirs. How on earth could a peasant, even in another land, speak a different tongue? Why, the animals would find it impossible to understand him! When I try to explain that each nation has its language and that this is spoken by everyone in that nation, he nods but I can see little glints of doubt in his eyes. 'I can understand,' he says. 'that objects belonging to a city have different names at Troesmis and in Rome; but that things like the earth, a tree, or a bird should have different names when they are everywhere alike—that I cannot understand.'

'You mean that you would have no difficulty in making yourself understood by one of our peasants?'

'That's it,' he replies, with a grateful glance, as if I had

given him the argument he was looking for. No doubt he is right, in a sense.

He wears a white smock secured at the waist by a red woollen girdle, and white *bracinae* or trousers falling to his ankles; and he goes bare-headed, the long chestnut-coloured hair tumbling about his shoulders. He is barefoot, too, so that the sun beats all day long on his toe-nails, and the soles of his feet are grey, hardened by exposure and apparently insensitive to stones and pebbles as also to heat and cold. He speaks to his horses as if they were beings like himself, and gets angry with them or smiles at them, often ignoring my presence, and becoming wholly absorbed in a conversation which sounds like a monologue, though it is not, because the horses answer him in their own way. He suddenly asks me if I am married and have children. I answer: 'Yes, I'm married but I have no children. My wife has a child.' 'So you married a widow?' 'No, my wife had been separated from her first husband, who is still alive, as also are the two wives I had before I married Fabia.' 'And did they marry your wife's former husband?' I answer: 'No, because with us one can only marry one wife.' 'And why did you abandon them? Were they incapable of giving you children?' 'No, that wasn't the reason. We simply didn't get on.' 'Aaah!' The questions continue. 'And do you get on with the third?' 'Oh, yes.' 'Is she at Tomis with you?' 'No, she remained in Rome.' 'Then that didn't work either.'

I ride beside him all day long. He casts me a sideways glance when my replies sound entirely illogical and I feel the reproach in his half-closed eyes. He drives with his elbows on his knees, and back hunched up, while his gaze is fixed somewhere on the end of the road. I should have to describe the history of Rome from the beginning, to make him understand the complications of divorce and to find a justification for it. Another thing that he simply cannot understand is a six-storeyed house. How can one live at the top without fear of falling on the heads of those who occupy the lower floors, and how can one bear living below other people without the constant dread of being crushed by their fall? 'Doesn't it ever

happen that a six-storeyed house collapses?' 'Yes, it sometimes happens,' I admit. 'So you see!' And he casts me one of those sidelong glances, as if to say: 'Well, if houses collapse, why build them up to six storeys? And if such houses are built, what idiot would put himself and his family into such a death-trap? Or else perhaps you are fooling me.' From Comozous's point of view everything in Rome, the women, the houses and everything else, is absurd. Yesterday evening, while foddering the horses in the inn yard at Zousidava, he sang the ballad of the little ewe, the song Geta had sung that night on the beach at Histria.

Comozous has a son and three daughters who, with his wife Zudeciltup, live on Sedida's estate near Troesmis. To-night, before going to bed, he produced a long, shining flute, yellow with age and wear, and began to play melancholy and slightly monotonous airs which evidently recall ancient folk-tales. He played for the horses rather than for me, and his airs have the same rhythm as the countryside we have been passing through since the afternoon, rising and falling like the wooded hills about us. Or again, the story they relate moves to the rhythm of a flock of sheep which takes the same form as it mounts and descends these gentle slopes among the trees, or beside a stream, advancing steadily towards the plain, protected by the shadow of the mountains or with the mountains ahead, prepared to receive the last rays of the sinking sun. Any other kind of music would be inconceivable in this country. The sonorous wood-notes, the breath that drives the air through the cunning holes of the flute, the ear that listens and always interprets the music in the same way, under the pressure of the same images—all this seems to be modelled on the harmonious curve of the hills. I have never seen such gently flowing lines. We are at this moment on the level summit of a hill: the sun has just dropped behind the mountains and from the valley of the salt-water stream at our feet shadows are very slowly rising, for the days are long at this season. Tall poplars quiver by the watercourse and here and there, from an isolated cabin, a column of smoke rises heavenward. Our horses are cropping

the thick grass and I can hear the greedy crunching sound of their jaws. Comozous has kindled a fire near the wagon and while he goes through the long ritual of preparing the daily *malana*, I stretch my legs by pacing up and down, and filling my eyes and soul with the immensity of mountain, plain, forest and sky, with their shape, their colours and their sounds. This immensity I should describe as *peace*, a peace that speaks of a remote past or a remote future when the human soul had, or will have, the same form as the landscape I now behold. I am living without fear, for the first time since I came into the world.

* * *

'... and great sadness will come upon him and be with him all his days.' Comozous has just been describing the ritual of the elect. Every four years the finest youth in the kingdom—the bravest and most virtuous of the young warriors—undertakes the journey to the beyond. In presence of the king and the high priest, he is appointed as emissary for the Dacians to Zamolxis. The king says, for example: 'You will inform our God that this year we intend to attack the cities which the Romans took from us last year. We pray Him to fight as always on our side and to strengthen our arms in battle.' Or the high priest will say 'You will tell Zamolxis that His people are obeying the laws He gave them' (or that they are not obeying these laws). The messenger then mounts the high wall surrounding Sarmisegetuza the chief capital of the Dacians, and, fixing his eyes on the heaven to which he will be shortly ascending, throws himself upon the spears which are directed at him from below by his comrades, the king's warriors. If his heart is transfixed and he dies at once, it means that Zamolxis has accepted messenger and message; if he does not die, another young warrior, judged better than he, will take his place on the wall. 'And great sadness will come upon him and be with him all his days.' Life here below has no value for the Dacians. He who dies on the spear-points or those who fall on the field of battle lose the life of the body

and gain the eternal life of the soul in the realm of Zamolxis. They can therefore be the most dangerous of enemies, as they are never afraid of losing what we consider the greatest of gifts and what for them is the gift of least account. If they were united in one kingdom and disposed of our weapons and military science, they would be lords of the whole earth if they wished. Here is a fine contradiction: the Dacians who could be the masters of all other peoples will never aspire to that honour, because they disdain terrestrial glory. Their desire is not to deprive other peoples of liberty but to preserve their own, wholly bent as they are on the supreme ideal that no Dacian forgets for a moment: eternal happiness beyond the bounds of this perishable body, symbol of what is sorrowful and ephemeral.

* * *

The house of Scorys, a cousin of Sedida and friend of Comozous, is raised on four stout pillars of grey stone, two feet above the ground. It is built wholly of wood. To reach it you climb five wooden steps worn smooth with continual use. The inner walls are also of wood, but whereas, on the outside, the rounded and untrimmed tree trunks are horizontal, the inside planks are vertical. Great cleanliness prevails. The beds are high and provided with dark blue woollen blankets, on the borders of which are embroidered birds and yellow flowers. The family take their meals at a low, round table, seated on three-legged stools exactly like those that Dokia has at Tomis; except that here I am in the home of a rich Dacian, a real peasant king. Scorys's household consists of his mother, his wife and six children, and he reigns over them with a dignity tempered with a sort of barbarian kindness. He speaks of my journey out of politeness but his real desire is to have news of Rome and the Emperor. He is quite well informed and gives me a piece of information I did not know. The Dacians had often intervened in our civil wars. Since the time of Burebista, the great king who had united all the Dacians under his rule and who was murdered by a traitor, the Dacians had

supported Pompey against Caesar and Antony against Octavian, that is, they had backed the regionalists who favoured local autonomy, against the out and out centralizers. Burebista's successors made advances to Augustus, in the days when he was still only Octavian, but he refused their alliance. They then offered it to Antony who, however, was crushed by his rival. Cotyso, king of western Dacia, made further advances to the latter, proposing an alliance which was to be sealed by two marriages: Cotyso was to marry the Emperor's daughter Julia, while the Emperor was to marry Cotyso's daughter. But Augustus was afraid of this alliance and so Cotyso's plan came to nothing. Whenever there has been a crisis in our affairs the Dacians have wanted to intervene, and in the time of Scorylos, a descendant of Burebista, their impetuosity was such that the king had recourse to a symbolic spectacle in order to bring them to a sense of reality and prevent them from embarking on a risky enterprise. Having assembled his military commanders, he brought out two hunting dogs which began savagely to attack each other. He then caused a wolf to be loosed. Immediately the dogs, forgetting their personal quarrel, sprang upon the common enemy. The lesson was clear enough, and the Dacian generals ceased to insist. The dogs represented the Roman factions, the wolf symbolized the Dacians.

In relating this story Scorys could not, and probably did not even wish to conceal his attitude to Augustus and Antony. He had hated the future Emperor and would have liked Antony to win the battle of Actium.

'Your Emperor does not love us,' he remarked. 'He will never forgive the Dacians for being allies of Antony, and if he does not venture on a direct attack he will try to keep us disunited and to increase the rivalry between our five kings. But he is old. Do you think Tiberius will succeed him? Tiberius will certainly attack us without, however, daring to cross the Danube. After Tiberius you may perhaps have less aggressive emperors, and we on our side may once more deserve to have one king, if it be the will of Zamolxis. One king! Powerful and equal in power, Rome and Dacia would

perhaps cease to make war on each other; but weak and dis-united as we Dacians are at present, you will always be tempted to conquer us.'

No member of Scorys's family opened his mouth during the meal. They simply listened and, every time I replied to their father, gazed on me with a curiosity and admiration that were sometimes embarrassing. A Roman had sat at their table and actually understood their language.

After we had eaten, Scorys invited me into the orchard behind the house. This place must stand at a fair height above sea-level, as the apple-trees are still in flower. The sunbeams filtering through thousands of snowy petals became white, and a scent so pure that it made one think of a vestal's robe floated in the air. Along the wooden fence that bounded the orchard and was as high as a fortified palisade, dozens of hives, hollowed out of tree-trunks, were humming with bees, drunk with nectar. The sound of their wings was like distant and continuous thunder, or again like the rolling of a drum. Scorys breathed this bee-loud air with obvious pleasure. He felt himself the master of the bees, of thousands of bees who came and went for him between the flowers and the hives. Between the petal-laden branches I could see mountain heights clad in spruce-forest. They looked dark and hostile by contrast with the dazzling whiteness of the blossom which, however, made them seem nearer and suggested the thought that everything is tangible, even Zamolxis or a pardon from Augustus. I shall be among those mountains tomorrow.

My host sent one of his sons to bring me a carpet and cushion from the house and asked if I should like to take a siesta under the trees. The prospect delighted me and I was left to myself. With some difficulty I stretched my limbs on the carpet, which smelled of wool and mutton-fat, and settled down to rest; but I could not sleep. The light, intensified by the apple blossom, made my eyes burn. I covered them with my arm, but the position was too uncomfortable; so I let myself be lulled by the manifold voices of nature. I could distinguish the sudden flutter of a bird among the branches, the distant bleat of a calf and the deeper-toned reply of its

mother. The rhythmic blows of an axe on a tree-trunk (someone making bee-hives or chopping wood for the evening fire), the barking of a dog and suddenly, isolated and as it were protected by the other sounds, the call of a cuckoo. The continuous murmuring of the bees made me think of the music of the spheres because there were moments when it merged into itself as though engulfed by its very monotony.

* * *

I climbed on and on. The voice I had heard was clear. 'The roaring torrents meet in front of the Rock: that is your goal.' A stream which might somewhere swell into a river was flowing past me towards the valleys I had left behind. I had been climbing for hours, and I was seeking the Rock. It was near there that one entered the holy place. Finally the other stream came in sight. I could see its junction with the first, in front of a great rock beyond which appeared the dark mouth of the cave I was looking for. The water descended in a booming cascade and it was by its wild clamour, which throbbed and echoed among the hills, that I recognized the Rock of which the voice had spoken. I had to cross the broader stream by a number of stepping-stones—stones that had been there for centuries and that served as the only means of access for those who had heard the voice or whose destiny obliged them to enter the cavern. It was very dark once I had crossed the threshold, but I could still see, for the darkness was such that the human eye, though not other eyes, could pierce it. I continued to advance, a little tired after my long climb, but sure at last of my goal. The hardest part of the journey was over, and everything hitherto had been endurable if not pleasant, except when we were passing under the willows with their dead fruit and under the tall poplars. How horrible was the fruit that weighed down the branches, and its smell of rottenness and of the worms which were already devouring the inside of the fruit and would appear at any moment transformed into thousands of moths like moving flowers! and the poplars that cast no shade and whose lofty

branches were swarming with bats! One could not see them but only feel their presence. Everything, except for that part of the journey, had been quite easy. Now once I had reached the end of the cavern where the deep gloom allowed of no further progress, I had to stop. *Dig a square hole*: it was easy enough to say that, but I had no spade, not even a knife. So I traced the outline of a square with the point of my shoe. But then, how could I pour the three libations if I had brought neither milk and honey, nor sweet wine? So I poured the libations with fresh water that I raised in the palm of my right hand from the little stream at my feet; and as I had no white flour, which was what the voice had prescribed (but what had I been thinking of, to venture into these high places without all the things that were necessary?), I performed with my finger-tips the ritual gesture of the miller who sprinkles fresh flour over his parents' tomb. *And long and patiently I summoned up the dead*. It was then that my mother's shade rose before me, but she spoke no word, for that would have infringed the rites. It was Tiresias who spoke first, as I had expected: Tiresias the Theban prophet, you know as well as I, he who was to speak first, according to the voice, and thus he addressed me:

'Why, unhappy wretch, hast thou left the light of the sun to come to visit the dead in this place where no pleasure is? Away! Begone from the ditch! Turn away the point of thy sword, that I may drink the blood and speak words of truth.'

I had forgotten to bring the lamb and the black ewe that I was to sacrifice by the ditch, *turning the heads of the victims towards Erebus*, and I had no sword either, but Tiresias could not doubt of my obedience to the rites. Otherwise, how could I have found myself in his presence? I did not know. But this truth revealed to me the great secret of my life. I was already aware of it in a sense; but then, what had I come seeking here? Why this long and tiring journey, if I was simply learning things which I knew but which, repeated under the echoing roof of the cavern, acquired a fixed and immutable character? Tiresias began to speak:

'It is the return that thou seekest, noble Ovid; the return.

sweeter than honey. But a god must still make it hard for thee; for never, I fear, will the Earth-Shaker forget his rancour: he hates thee for having blinded his child. . . .'

The meaning of this prelude was clear. It was a question, evidently, of obtaining permission to return to Rome. The god who was making it difficult (difficult but possible in spite of everything) could be no other than Augustus, the 'Jupiter' of my *Epistulae*; difficult because the Earth-Shaker, that is the Emperor, who wanted to conquer the whole earth, is not yet disposed to forget his rancour, the cause of my exile. I had blinded his child Julia who was an enthusiastic reader of my *Art of Love* and who had followed the example of the literary models I offered. My poor book, then, was the one and only source of my woes, and I had come here to listen to an accusation as old as my sorrow.

Tiresias continued speaking but, while I was absorbed in the interpretation of his opening phrases, all the rest, which was the important part, escaped me. He would have revealed, no doubt, whether I was destined to return home or whether Tomis would be chosen by the gods as the tomb of my mortal remains, the perishable part of me, as Comozeus would say. The prophet fell silent and his shadow vanished into the gloom, for he had reached the end of his oracles. It was my mother who now approached and came to drink of the steaming blood. (But what blood could it be, when I had sacrificed no lamb or ewe in the ditch? Everything was happening as if the ritual had been duly accomplished, and that, after all, was what mattered.)

'My son,' she said, 'this place is not for the eyes of the living.'

'I know, mother,' I answered, 'but I have done my best to deserve to make the pilgrimage.' What had I done? I had forgotten. 'Tell me of my wife and of all I have left in Rome. I am alive, but I know not what has happened. You are dead, but you see and know. Tell me of my wife's thoughts and plans. Can she take good care of all my property which I have entrusted to her? Or has she already taken some noble Roman as her husband?'

My mother looked at me as she spoke, and I had my back to the opening of the cavern. Behind my mother, the deep gloom was beginning slowly to dissolve, like the mist that a warm breeze melts and scatters; and now I could see the end of the cavern. My mother was speaking, but her words slipped past my ears as water slips off the feathers of a bird. I recognized the words I had myself chanted: *Tantalus, a prey to his torments*. He was in the midst of a vast sheet of water, yet never did the water reach his parched lips. It was like true happiness, the happiness we all really need and which never reaches us. And I saw *Sisyphus* pushing the great rock uphill which, as soon as it reached the top of the hill, rolled back with a fearsome sound as of Time itself rolling back in the ages of woe which exist to entrap men and force them to begin all over again. And I saw *Hercules* spreading terror among the shades. He fitted an arrow to his bowstring and with ferocious eye sought a target among the dead, who were all taking flight, appalled at the idea of dying a second time. So the fear of death was eternal, like death itself. What then was the good of dying? 'Oh, the injustice!' I cried in horror. 'Where is He whom men look for?' I must have committed a grave fault because at that moment all the persons I had seen—*Tantalus*, *Sisyphus*, *Hercules* and the rest—vanished into the gloom that filled the cavern like a thick and stifling smoke.

From somewhere in the valley came the cuckoo's call, and a similar call, or else the echo of the first, sounded just beside me. White petals fluttered to the earth, like little flakes of down, and I found that my hand had plucked a few blades of grass in the course of this dream which had taught me nothing.

* * *

I was tired. We halted from time to time by the path, under the dark spruce-trees. *Scorys* was with me. Although as old as I, he is much stronger, the mountains are his home, and he climbed the steep and rocky path without an effort, while I panted along behind him, stopping occasionally to recover my

breath. Fortunately he is talkative and furnished even more information than I needed. At the upper end of the track rose the dwelling of the Dacian priests, or perhaps their temple, where Zamolxis's secret was to be revealed to me. The people call these priests *ctistes* or *polystis*, which means 'founders of cities'. The word is significant as proving clearly that the priests were the true founders of Getic society, and gave the Getae their first laws. They usually dwell on the highest mountains and, following the rule of Zamolxis and Pythagoras, they eat no meat. Milk, cheese and honey are their staple diet. The people also call them 'travellers in the clouds', a beautiful name. They hold all things in common, live austere lives and make a point of succouring all who are in poverty or distress. I remember a long time ago reading in a Greek book about a Palestinian sect known as the Essenians (I may have forgotten the exact name) whose virtues and mode of life are rather like what Scorvs told me about the Dacian priests. He would not however answer one of my questions, an essential one. Where exactly did the High Priest live, and where was Kogaïnon, the sacred mount? Was it the one we were climbing, or the higher one, further to the left? He merely said: 'The king visits the High Priest and seeks his counsel.' I did not insist. A little later he added: 'Kogaïnon is a place of pilgrimage; the only one we have'; but he would not tell me whether it was only the king who enjoys this privilege. What I did learn was that the priests are prophets, magi and physicians, that they know the secrets of the future, of the soul and of the body. Intending perhaps to put me off the track, Scorvs further added: 'Kogaïnon is the name of a mountain and also of a stream.' But was it this mountain, and the stream whose murmur rose from the valley beneath us?

Towards noon we reached an opening in the forest known as 'The Glade of the Apple Tree', though no such tree was anywhere visible. In the middle of the wide clearing stood a circular stone temple. Its doors were shut, but from a hole in the roof a plume of blue smoke rose into the sky. We crossed the clearing and once more plunged into the forest, along a faint track that led us to the mouth of a cave. Scarcely had we

entered when a voice bade us welcome, although, as my eyes were unaccustomed to the gloom, I could not at first distinguish any face. At last however I made out a long white tunic, with bare feet beneath and a little later the face of a priest, framed in a snow-white beard, which made me think of the apple-blossom and the dream I had had. Scorys spoke to him about me for a time, during which the priest gazed steadily, and without smiling, into my eyes. 'At this altitude,' I thought, 'apple-trees do not flourish. The Glade of the Apple Tree no doubt means the Priest's Glade.' This white-bearded, white-robed priest was but the visible soul of those marvellous trees, under whose shadow I had had a mystic dream. He did not tell me his name, but when the introduction was over, bowed quietly and pointed to a stool for me to sit down. Scorys saluted us and emerged into the sunlight, to await us no doubt at the opening of the glade or in front of the temple. The priest handed me a cup of milk, mixed with honey, which immediately cleared my brain and refreshed my body, for I was weary after the long climb. He then took his place opposite me and spoke at some length, though his first words were the only ones I distinctly remember. 'You call Zamolxis our God, but our God has as yet no name.' So everything that was known in Rome and Athens about the Dacian religion, everything that was related about Zamolxis and his teaching, was simply a Greek fabrication, an adaptation of an idea of God that was foreign to the Greek mind. People used to say that Zamolxis had travelled for some years in Greece and that Pythagoras, whose slave he had been, had instructed him in his doctrines. But the truth is that Zamolxis lived before Pythagoras. Herodotus even writes that Zamolxis returned from his travels with an immense fortune, but no one has explained how a slave could acquire an immense fortune. According to Herodotus again, Zamolxis used to invite his friends to magnificent feasts; and when they were assembled at his table, he told them that they would all inherit eternal life and receive, after death, all that they had desired during the ephemeral life of the body. Now those who are familiar with Zamolxis's doctrines will find it hard to accept this

feature of his life, because all his advice and instruction is marked by the greatest austerity. One day he caused an underground chamber to be built and, amid the weeping of a multitude of friends, had himself buried alive in it. But after being dead for three years he came back to life, full of the wisdom he had acquired during his long sojourn in the beyond.

According to the priest all these stories were legends. Zamolxis had perhaps never existed: he was simply a provisional name for the God whose name had not yet been revealed to men but would be, almost any day now. We are living in an age of folly and of hope, the age of the Expectation of God. Men will not perhaps be better, after the revelation, than they are now, but they will be able to distinguish clearly between good and evil. They will therefore be free to choose the right way or the evil way. The prophets of Israel had announced God's coming among men, and Zamolxis too had foretold it. For thousands of years men will go on killing each other, but a day will come when we shall all be brothers and when crime and war will have departed from the earth.

'You come from Rome,' said the priest. 'You and your people are enemies of my people. But I receive you here, I address you as a brother and feel that your heart is full of goodness, repentance, love and hope. You suffer from being far from your friends and from the earth and the sky where you were born. Know that the same sky stretches over our blood-stained lands and that your exile is simply a preparation. You must not be sad in Tomis, but prepare yourself for the future life, which is not far distant. That is the eternal life, and sorrow will be unknown, for time has no meaning save within the duration of sorrow. The Styx and all that its waters encompass have no existence. You will be, or you will not be. Those who exist will experience nothing but joy, for they will dwell in the light of God, and His light is goodness. Try not to work evil, for evil is the source of eternal death.

Reflect that the soul is of your making, that you fashion it every day with your good deeds and that the soul alone is immortal.'

He looked at me again, gently yet severely, and asked me: 'What is the worst deed you have ever committed?'

I reflected. No criminal act had sullied my life. To Augustus I should have said: 'The *Ars amatoria*,' but in the presence of this old man who spoke to me of God, I could not feel that a fine book was an evil act. So I said: 'Pride. I was a man of pride.' But I was not sure of having spoken the truth—it was uncertain in my mind—for I did not know just what God wished of me. The boundary between good and evil was not clear in my conscience.

'You want to go to Kogaïnonon,' said the priest.

My heart was beating violently. I could hear its regular pulsation in my breast. I could even feel it in my fingertips. Then I looked at the priest and understood. Tears came into my eyes and I was filled with a happiness I had never known before.

'No,' I replied.

The priest smiled, arose, laid his hand on my head and murmured a prayer the words of which escaped me. He then signed to me to follow him and we emerged from the cave into the dazzling sunlight. A shady path led us to the mountain-top which commanded a vast panorama. On one side I could see the hills above the salt-water stream, on the other a range of heights beyond which, according to the priest, stood a plateau encompassed with high mountains, like a fortress. This was the cradle of the Dacians, the very heart of their country, the seat of its legendary kings and of Sarmisegetuza, the former capital of Dromichet and Burebista. A carpet of short, thick sward covered the height on which we were standing. Our feet sank deep into it. To recover breath we sat there for a time before attempting to walk down. A sweet smell of grass poured into my nostrils as if the earth herself were breathing around me. I bent over, the better to catch this perfume which rose on every side and shimmered in the air above the hilltops. The sun-warmed grass was as silky as human hair under my fingers and the scent of it penetrated my lungs and my whole being. Fatigue vanished as by enchantment. I lay flat on the ground, my

head buried in the sweet-scented grass that restored my strength and with it a sensation of youthfulness. It is true that the priest might have taken offence at a posture somewhat lacking in respect, but at that moment I was thinking only of myself. I wanted to cry, so keen was the joy that filled me. My life, I felt, had ceased to be a kaleidoscope or a series of separate compartments; no wall divided me from my childhood or my years in Rome, but my life was an harmonious whole, fashioned by pleasure and suffering, and this whole was accepted as it was by Him whom we may call the Supreme Judge.

I got up and looked at the priest. He did not wait for me to question him. 'You have loved much,' he said, 'and your love-affairs have been the cause of your suffering. Think not that your poetry has ever betrayed you. Think not it is your love-affairs that you are expiating in exile. The judgment pronounced by Augustus has no bearing on your soul. He too has acted under the invisible pressure of God, and God has brought you here to learn the truth about Him, or at least that part of the truth which we are permitted to know. You will learn other things too before you die, for your soul is more and more open to the divine inspiration. You have sinned through love. Love is knowledge. Real sin is what one cannot or dare not put into words.'

He rose and held out his hand. The infinite space around me was so quiet and intimate that it seemed to be stretching towards me green and restful arms, or else to be inviting me to fly above it, as if everything were possible, not only its movement towards me but my impulse to it. The priest and I descended by another path which led us behind the forest to an unwooded hill where we left the track and made our way down a slope covered with tall grasses. They overtopped our heads. Faintly-scented flowers, yellow, blue, white and pink, brushed against my face, and the stems opened to let us pass with a delicate rustle like the sound of water falling down a mossy slope. From time to time my face was sprinkled with dew-drops and when at the foot of the hill we emerged from the tall herbage, I was drenched from head to foot as if

I had just come out of a river. The priest loosed my hand and it was only at that moment that I realized what had hitherto escaped me: since he had helped me to rise from the grassy carpet on which he had been talking with me, he had continued to hold my hand as if our descent from the hilltop had been an initiation the meaning of which he had taken care not to reveal.

The sun was not long in warming me and in drying my feet and tunic. We continued to descend and after crossing a brook began to climb through a grove of birch-trees which are called *berzes* in Dacian, a word that means spotted black and white, until we reached the Glade of the Apple Tree. Here Scorys was lying on the grass, waiting for us. The priest embraced me twice and held me for a moment in his arms. He then moved towards the temple while we resumed our journey back to Scorys's house. 'It is time to return,' observed Scorys. 'You are no doubt hungry.'

I was not hungry.

* * *

Night had fallen, I was tired, and we were still making our way downwards. The moon was not yet up, but suddenly I saw a white gleam amid the shadows. 'Is that the moon?' I asked Scorys.

'No, it is my apple-trees.'

* * *

They filed past without intermission. I counted more than three hundred and there were others further off that I could not see. The grass muffled the sound of the hooves, and I might well have supposed myself the victim of an hallucination if the neighing of a horse or a word shouted in an unknown tongue had not suddenly convinced me that it was all real. There were no oxen and wagons, no women or children to hamper the march, but only armed men. Which way they were going was clear. Comozaus had been the first

to see them at a moment when we were nearing the top of a knoll that commanded a vast prospect over the dense oak-forests and as far as the distant plains. The red beams of the sunset glistened on their buckles as they walked their horses across a clearing. They were coming from the east and moving southward. Were they allies of the Getae or else of the Romans and Thracians? Had they only pillage as their object or was someone subsidizing them to provoke a conflict? Were they driven by hunger or the pressure of other tribes to seek new lands that would support their families, or was this the opening phase of the great war that threatened between the Dacians and ourselves? Who could have said? 'Sarmatians,' Comozous had whispered as he pointed at them. He immediately put the horses to the trot, and our wagon halted only when we were deep among the hazel thickets. Having picketed the horses in a little glade nearby, we crept softly through the trees in the direction of the barbarians' line of march. The hazel-wood stretched along a narrow valley which allowed us to remain hidden and, when we had mounted a low eminence, to see without being seen. There was no longer any doubt: the strangers were making for Troesmis, which at their present rate they would reach next day about nightfall. To try to overtake them by forced marches, in order to warn the garrison, would have been absolute folly because, once in the open plain, we should have been quickly detected and captured. As I contemplated the tired, dusty faces which were in no way terrible or malicious, a sense of pity gradually came over me. I remembered the famished Getae who had attacked Tomis in the early days of my exile. These Sarmatians were no doubt driven south by hunger and fear, seeking a land of plenty or hoping to find some place where they could work in peace and bring up their children in safety from the arrows of the Scythians. Though they were capable of slaughtering men and burning farmsteads, they did it only to escape perishing in their turn under the onslaught of other barbarians who, like them, were driven westward by other hordes, more desperate and therefore stronger—and so on. The vast plains that spread away beyond the Tyras towards

the unknown East swarmed with tribes which were pushing steadily towards our farmlands like insects blindly drawn towards the light. Who could have found the magic word to arrest their advance? Weapons were not enough. But the word, the magic word, would have endowed them with a name and a soul, would have brought them into the community of men, would have taught them to settle down, to pardon each other, to develop a conscience and also to feel the need of a past and a future. But that word had not yet been born, and armies were striving in vain to supply its place, from Spain and Gaul in the west to the Euxine and the Danube in the east. The Romans were everywhere extending the bounds of Empire by cutting off heads and establishing laws, but they did not suspect that the earth has no boundary and that their enterprise required as many men as all the other men in the world. The Sarmatians I was watching and who looked more and more weary as day gave place to night would be crushed by the Romans or the Getae, but other men, humbled by famine and despair, would follow them at the same pace and with the same hungry look.

The priest had brought peace to my soul. But how could one appease the souls of all these horsemen? A torrent of milk and loaves would not have satisfied them. They would have pushed on in quest of golden apples or the fount of eternal youth and if they had found such marvels they would have continued to seek others. Their hunger and thirst were perhaps like mine, like the hunger and thirst of Corinna and Dokia, of Honorius and Mucaporus, and the women of Rome and Alexandria. The peoples were on the march, lured on by hopes unrealized.

At nightfall we returned to where the horses had remained tethered. As it was risky to light a fire, we made shift with some cold *malana* and cheese. I then lay down, but I could not sleep, nor indeed could Comozeus. He got up, and I could hear him talking to the horses for a time, before he lay down again. The hoot of an owl heralded the rising moon, and after a while fingers of silver light stole in among the big leaves of the hazels. Comozeus made up his mind at last to

speak to me. His people, he said, were in danger, as were Sedida and the city of Troesmis. It was his duty to warn them and find a place of safety for his family. He would take one of the horses and gallop all night long. Dawn would see him on the banks of the Danube, as he knew the shortest way. He was leaving me the other horse so that I could return to Scorys's house in the mountains, where I should be in safety. Alternatively, I could await his return where I was, as the wagon was well stored with provisions. He was planning to seek refuge for his family with Scorys. There was certainly going to be war, it would be a long war, and they would have to abandon the fertile plains and return to the mountain forests where they had been born. He would pick me up on his way back to the hills. Then I could live with them and Scorys, at least until the war was over. If on the other hand I thought of returning to Tomis, he would escort me as far as Troesmis or, if necessary, Noviodunum, where I could always find a Greek or Roman galley to take me home.

I decided to remain where I was, being in no condition to ride or to return on foot to the house of Scorys. In my present retreat I had nothing to fear; I must only refrain from lighting a fire that would betray my presence. Comozous would return two days later, after nightfall. He saluted me, took his bag from the wagon, untied one of the two horses, jumped on to its back and vanished into the gloom of the hazel-wood. All this had happened in a few moments, and now I was alone in the heart of a Dacian forest, cut off by the Sarmatians from any possibility of getting home. And suppose Comozous did not return? He had not even thought of that. If his plan should miscarry --and of that I should not fail to judge after waiting three or four days in vain--I could still make my way to the house of Scorys, on foot or on horseback, by putting forth my utmost effort. I had only to follow the course of the salt-water stream. There was no possibility of going astray.

I was not afraid. I fell asleep under the arched cover of the now familiar wagon, amid the smell of cheeses, salt meat and smoked trout, stored in the boxes of spruce-bark that Scorys

and his wife had given us. I had even a pot of honey and a sack of flour for *malana*, though without fire I could not prepare the latter. The forest might remain beset for weeks.

I observed on awakening that the horse had broken his halter in the night and followed his companion. He would probably be caught by the Sarmatians or, with a little luck, he might get back to his stable. I spent the early part of the day in obliterating the tracks left by the wagon between the road and my woodland retreat, and also in keeping a lookout for the barbarians; but I did not see any. The invasion had passed by, for the moment. Comozeus had got home. I should have told him to warn the Romans at Troesmis, but he will no doubt do so if he thinks it would help his family. Thousands of birds were singing in the branches and I even saw a brace of pheasants, whose straight and rather slow flight makes them an easy mark for the bowman. No sound of horses or vehicles reached me. The Getae in the neighbourhood knew about the invasion and were remaining at home, while those in the plain were awaiting nightfall in order to travel in safety.

During the afternoon the silence emboldened me to cross the stream, which was a fresh-water brook, the salt stream being further to the west. I then began to climb the opposite slope. This was steep, and past the belt of hazel trees it was covered with densely growing oaks. The forest, however, did not extend beyond the crest of the hill. On the further side the slope was much gentler, forming a kind of plateau inclining eastward. The earth had been ploughed and the corn, still green, trembled in the breeze. Not daring to show myself, I skirted the cornfield under cover of the wood. And then suddenly I saw a house, straight in front of me. It was really only a cottage, built of wood and roofed with a sort of coat-of-mail, also of wood. The sheepskins that covered the windows were half-raised and the door was open. A dog began to bark in front of the kennel to which it was chained. A cow lowed somewhere near. Then there appeared on the threshold an old man in Dacian costume, with long white locks falling to his shoulders. Not seeing me at first, he looked this way and that, and spoke to the dog to quieten it; but as it barked more than

ever in my direction, he called out: 'Who goes there?' I came into the open, having indeed little choice in the matter, since the old man could have loosed the dog after me. When I addressed him in his own language he came to meet me and saluted me respectfully. He showed no surprise at my dress, but invited me to enter.

The inside of the cottage consisted of a single room. In the great hearth on the left the fire had gone out, but on the right the mistress of the house was seated at her spinning-wheel, intent on the complicated play of hands and feet. She bowed as she rose to offer me a goblet of milk and a spoonful of honey. We then sat round a low table and I told them of my adventures. They knew Scorys and at once invited me to share their evening meal and to spend the night with them.

Their son had set out that morning for Zousidava in order to learn what was happening and to see whether the king needed his service. If he failed to return during the night, it would mean that he had left for the war. Their elder son had been killed in the last war: Zamolxis had called him to himself. For the rest, they made no comment, except that they would be very much alone if their younger son joined his brother in Heaven. Not that the old woman spoke at all. She simply encouraged me to eat, smiling at me from time to time or getting up to bring salt or water. This old couple intrigued me. Their faces were familiar to me, and yet that seemed absurd. Where on earth could I have met them? Then, at the end of the meal, I remembered. It was in their likeness that, years ago, I had conceived of the happy old couple, Philemon and Baucis. They had sheltered Jupiter in their home and given him food and drink. He had performed miracles in their presence and when at last, to reward them, he had asked what they most ardently desired, so that he could grant their wish without delay, he received the following reply: 'Auferat hora duos eadem . . .'¹ for they still bore each other a tender love, 'annis juncti juvenalibus.'² These verses came to me from

¹ '[Grant] that we both die in the same hour . . .' (*Metamorphoses*, Book VIII).

² ' . . . having been united in the time of their youth.'

very far away, but like the old people they were part of my past.

I declined their invitation. It was necessary to spend the night in the wagon because Comozous might return with his family and if he did not find me there he might suppose that the worst had happened and continue on his journey. The old man accompanied me as far as the stream, after which I pursued my way through the hazel-wood in the stillness of the deepening twilight.

I quickly fell asleep, but the night was not restful as I was tormented by nightmare and awoke in a bath of perspiration. A number of wagons were coming up the road. They were Dacians from the plain, seeking refuge in the wooded hills. Comozous must, I thought, be among them: I even heard the hasty trotting of a company of horsemen. Then I fell asleep, only to awake again. The wagons were now moving away towards the hills with the dull, incomprehensible murmur of human suffering. But fatigue again overcame me and I fell into a dreamless slumber. What finally awoke me was an access of coughing and the cold that comes with early dawn.

The world was very silent. The wagon-train had passed away like mist, and Comozous had not come. But a smell of burning crept into my shelter with the early light, the smell that must have started my coughing. I jumped out. Thick smoke was drifting among the leaves and I could hear the distant crackle of a forest fire. I picked up one of the curving Dacian swords, to subdue the fear that was coming over me, and made for the stream which I could follow upwards in safety if I were hemmed in by the flames. The forest was burning on the opposite slope, in the direction of the old couple's home which I had visited. Had the conflagration started there, or had the Sarmatians set fire to the cottage? I remembered hearing cries in my sleep, but could I be sure I had? Philemon and Baucis were going to meet their elder son earlier than they had expected, and if the war continued the younger son would rejoin them.

The heat of the fire warmed my face, but I still lingered, feeling terribly alone, brutally separated from the old couple

who had received me the day before. Some fearful error brooded over the world, some fault unknown and inscrutable was provoking God's anger. The fault was so distant that the very memory of it had been lost, and no messenger came to remind us of it. Men offered sacrifices and burned incense on the altars of a thousand gods, but all this was useless because the true God was still unwilling to speak. It might go on a long time like this, it had been going on for thousands of years; but our sufferings had a limit and, if this God existed, He must surely take pity on our wretchedness and give us a sign. Otherwise this silence meant that there was no God, or else that all these dead, this endless suffering and fearful silence, had a meaning which our reason was impotent to grasp.

A fine rain began to fall. This made the smoke thicker and forced me to retreat. My eyes smarted, and I could still see flames through the choking mist. The rain fell more heavily. Then, behind me, a voice cried: 'Ovid! Ovid!' And in the midst of this solitude and these disasters, burdened with my past and my instinct to escape danger, I realized I was accepting at any cost the promise of life with all its prospects of sorrow and injustice. I was ready to beg mercy of an invisible Augustus, and I felt pity for myself, and then disgust; but I wanted to live.

I had recognized the voice of Comozous.

* * *

The rain had stopped towards mid-afternoon but the damp wood-ashes were still warm. Comozous and I made our way up the slope between burnt and blackened tree trunks. Sedida and my friend's family had continued their journey into the mountains, where they intended to remain. The war showed no sign of ending and the lowlands were dangerous. True, the Sarmatians were already drawing back a little, but it would now be a real war 'between us and them', the inevitable conflict, while on both sides men awaited in vain the coming of God or at least the revealing sound of His voice. The Sar-

matians had halted at the Danube, after burning the crops and the *davae* encountered on their way. The city of Zousidava had successfully resisted and the Getae at this moment were in pursuit of the enemy.

I saw some charred ruins in the distance but no trace of the old couple, or the dog, or the cow I had heard lowing. Had they escaped or were their remains lying under the ashes of their home? What I think had happened was this. When warned by the dog's barking, Philemon had come to the threshold and asked, in that voice of his which seemed to apologize for its curiosity: 'Who is there?' An arrow had nailed him to the door. Then Baucis had emerged, without a cry and simply that Jupiter's promise might more readily be accomplished. 'Auferat hora duos eadem. . . .' A second arrow had struck her down. And the flames had purified their happiness and lifted them heavenward, like two wisps of smoke.

We left for Troesmis at nightfall. The horse which had deserted me had returned safely to Comozous and was now trotting by his companion, indifferent to the outer world. The war had merely meant a temporary separation. Once again he could feel a friendly crupper graze against his own as they trotted side by side. As far as he was concerned the war was over and with it injustice. He could believe in the re-establishment of order in the world because he had a proof of it. The voice of Comozous was for this horse the voice of God, who had abandoned him but whom he had found again after a little effort.

'The Danube,' said Comozous, nudging me.

The mass of grey water, of which the further bank was invisible in the haze, was flowing seaward with rhythmic gurgling and plashings. The animals had halted and for a time no one moved. A raven flew over our heads so low that I could hear the whistle of air through its wing-feathers: but on seeing us it uttered a cry of fear and made off in another direction. The waters had the same colour as the raven's cry.

FIFTH YEAR



People often say: 'He has come back from the war a different man'; or else: 'His wife's death has completely changed him'; or again: 'I met Caius after that absurd religious crisis he has just gone through. I didn't recognize him; he has become another man.' All this is false. Man never changes, nothing in the world can change him. The most far-reaching experience never transforms his essential character, which is something final. One merely grows older. One finds it less easy to judge of things and, after a crisis or a deeper revelation of the world, one acts more wisely. Illusions fall away like a bird's feathers. One is wiser, or one goes mad.

Here I am at Tomis. Months have passed since my journey into the land of the Dacians, where I learned more in a few weeks than in all the rest of my life. There, I saw purity and death, I saw suffering and the simplest *joie de vivre*; there, the secret of life and death was partly revealed to me. I ought to have been utterly changed and become another man, as people say. Yet I find myself once more in the state of expectation that tormented me before I set out, the same expectation, I now realize, that drove me at the age of twenty to visit Greece, with the same intensity and the same hope in my heart and thoughts. Was I not the same at Sulmo, in Rome and here in Tomis? The difference, because there is one, is that previously I did not know what I was expecting and that, since I have been at Tomis and especially since my journey beyond the Danube, I know. But the certainty is not calculated to reassure me. Thousands of men before me, not only Virgil but Sophocles and Plato, Pythagoras and Thales, have

no doubt awaited the same thing. And as they received no answer, each responded in solitude to his torment. But this simply led him round again to the same expectation, it was simply a new way of stretching out one's arms to one who vouchsafed no reply. I have not many years to live and I doubt whether this age will be a privileged one. The expectation is greater than ever. It no longer tortures a few privileged beings, but has become a general torment. We live in the age of expectation, and no human solution is now acceptable or possible. Yet how dare we believe that our ears are attuned to catch the word for which mankind has hoped for thousands of years past? And if I did catch it, could it change me?

The winter this year has been milder, the sea has not frozen and the north winds have died away before reaching us. The sky is often veiled, yet there are no snowfalls. Honorius has just told me that winter is practically over and that some Greek galleys are expected here tomorrow. Though it is still only February, the shipowners and seamen were informed last September by an oracle that spring would come very early. And now they have no time to lose.

* * *

Dokia still asks me for news of Sedida and Scorys and their families as if I had returned only yesterday. So I repeat the news I gave her months ago, enlivening it with reflections or comments I had not previously thought of. She thanks me with her eyes, like a child who begs one to tell the same story over and over again. He knows it by heart, yet a new word, or intonation, is enough to change the whole colour of the narrative. 'Did you know that old couple?' I asked her one day; and then I told her of our meeting and how I had made friends with them that afternoon in the quiet farmstead, and of their tragic end under the arrows of the Sarmatians or perhaps in the flames of their burning house. She seemed to be more impressed by the beginning than by the end of the story. For the Dacians, death is what we should call 'the happy ending'. What they find hard to endure is life.

* * *

There has been a heavy snowfall this April morning. I seem to hear the tears of winter which is melting away at the touch of the warm spring. The city is full of noise and bustle as if the inhabitants had awakened earlier than usual for some festival or commemoration and all felt animated by the same enthusiasm. Tomis is the living image of human unconsciousness, or heedlessness. It lives on the brink of danger and will be one of the first victims of any future catastrophe, yet the people do not worry. At bottom, they are absolutely right. To live is to run a risk. They have been living for centuries on the brink of peril and up to now nothing serious has befallen them.

There is a memory I do not want to recall, but a mere allusion is enough to bring the whole tragic picture before my eyes. It was on my return from last year's pilgrimage. I had embarked at Troesmis on a sailing-boat which was to take me to Noviodunum whence a galley would transport me to Tomis. After taking leave of Comozeus I felt more solitary than I had been in the heart of the Dacian forests. The boat was gliding seawards like a dead leaf, keeping near to the left bank where the current was stronger. A column of smoke marked the place where the Sarmatians had passed. Then, suddenly, the smoke was hidden by a line of tall poplars whose silvery foliage rustled in the light breeze. I shut my eyes at sight of the first corpse that I saw swaying from a rope. Then I opened them. But there was another body, with bloodstained features, straight in front of me. There were in fact more than fifty, their eyes pecked out and their faces torn by ravens and seagulls. Thus had the Dacians avenged themselves for the pillage, the burning and the massacres they had suffered.

I still bore, graven in my heart, the words the priest had spoken on that mountain-top which was as warm and smooth as a horse's back. There was still in my nostrils the sweet smell of the mountain grass in which I had buried my face; and in my eyes, the superhuman peace of those countless hills billowing away to the horizon like the rise and fall of a song. Yet one had to be strong to believe in the reality of those memories and in the priest's promise to me. Reality, everyday reality,

was here before me now, hanging among the branches which had flowered in the May sunshine and were already weighted with fruit. Was this the real fruit of life? How could one forget, how could one change?

I sometimes even say to myself: 'Is it we who invented cruelty and torments? Men rise in rebellion against men. The victors torture and finish off the vanquished.' But then I think of Prometheus who had done no evil, and of the torture Jupiter inflicted on him. And I think of Niobe, daughter of Tantalus. . . . The Theban women, at the instigation of Manto, who knew the future, went one day to burn incense and offer up prayers to Latona, mother of Apollo and Diana. But now appeared Niobe, the king's daughter, who was mother of seven sons and seven daughters.

Ecce venit comitum Niobe celeberrima turba.

Beautiful, or as fair as anger permitted, she cried to the Theban women: 'What folly is this, that you put the gods above what you see before you? And why these altars to Latona when my own divinity has received no incense?' For although she was mortal, Atlas was one of her ancestors and Jupiter the other. So now with imprudent words she began to magnify her wealth and happiness:

*Sum felix: quis enim neget hoc? Felixque manebo;
Hoc quoque quis dubitet? Tutam ne copia fecit.
Major sum, quam cui possit Fortuna nocere;
Multaque ut eripiat, multo nihi plura relinquet.¹*

'Suppose,' she continued, 'that some of my multitude of children be taken from me, I should still not be reduced, even stripped down to two, like Latona's troop. Is there so much to choose between her and a childless woman? Begone, haste

¹ 'Happy am I, and happy shall remain;
Who doubts it? For abundance makes me safe.
I am too great for Fortune's power to hurt;
Though I lost much, yet much would still be left'

(*Metamorphoses*, Book VI).

away from her altar, and remove those laurels from your heads.'

The goddess, hearing these words, straightway summoned her two children, her 'troop' as Niobe had called them, and spoke of the sacrilege. Then Apollo and Diana sped swiftly through the air, hidden by a great cloud, and came to perch on the walls of Thebes like ravens of ill omen.

Outside the walls

Lay a wide plain, as hard, almost, as pavement
From the beat of galloping hoofs and rolling chariots.
There some of Niobe's seven sons were riding
On crimson-coloured saddle-cloths; the reins,
The bridles, heavy with gold. The oldest son,
Ismenus, leaning inward, pulling hard
On the foaming bit to make a turn, screamed out
In sudden agony, let fall the reins
An arrow in his heart, sank slowly, sidewise,
Over the horse's shoulder to the ground.
And Sipylus, his brother, heard the quiver
Rattle in empty air, and gave full rein,
Turned on all possible speed, as a ship's master,
Conscious of storm coming on, at sight of a cloud.
Crowds on all sail, takes every possible breeze
To help his scudding home. He gave full rein,
Drove fast in flight, but the arrow drove much faster,
The shaft stuck quivering in his neck, the barb
Came through at the front of the throat. Still leaning
forward,
He made a headlong dive, over the mane,
Between the galloping legs, and the ground took
The stain of his warm life-blood. Phaedimus
And Tantalus, named for his mother's father,
Were winding up their morning exercise
In wrestling, and the shining bodies strained
In close embrace and hold, and a sped arrow
Fixed them in that embrace and hold; as one
They groaned, as one they writhed, and the eyes whitened
And the last breath left their bodies. And Alphenor,
Watching them die, came running up to help them,
To untangle the cold limbs; in that devotion.

Alphenor fell: Apollo's arrow pierced him
Through chest and lungs, and when he pulled the shaft
Out of the wound, part of the lungs came with it,
And the blood followed. The young Damasichthon
Was hit behind the knee, and as the hand
Reached down to pull the arrow out, another,
More accurate, more swift, struck through the throat,
Emerged with feathers dyed a different colour.
There was only one left now, Hioneus,
Who tried, in vain, to pray: 'Spare me, O gods,
All of you, spare me!' He did not seem to know
He need not pray to all of them; Apollo
Was moved, a little too late, it seemed, for pity,
For the arrow had left the bow-string. Still, that wound
Was the most merciful.¹

After the death of her sons, Niobe still dared defy the goddess:

... So many
Are dead, and still I win! ...²

But the bowstring twanged in the terror-laden air; and Niobe's seven daughters fell, one after the other, even the youngest whom her mother had tried to protect with her own body.

... So she sat there,
A childless woman among her sons, her daughters,
Beside her husband, and never moved ...³

And the mother, who had raised her voice against the gods, was changed into a block of stone which streams with tears even to this day. For the thirst of the gods can be quenched only with blood.

The *Metamorphoses* are full of similar stories which are not of my invention. We invent nothing. Everything has been

written in us, from the beginning, by the hand of the gods. So was that smoke that I see rising from the village, and those Sarmatians hanging from the poplar-boughs.

* * *

On leaving the gymnasium where I have been accustomed for some time past to spend at least one afternoon a week, I was accosted by Lydia. Herimon has become an object of fear to her, his passion grows more unbearable every day. He is jealous, he tortures her with questions, makes her cry and strikes her violently. She showed me the purple bruises on her shoulders. Then he falls on his knees and begs her to kill him. She likes him well enough, but after all he is a married man. They are rarely together. He has his duties, she her temptations. I ought to warn him not to go on pursuing her in this way.

For some time now she and I have been on a footing of friendship. I think her as beautiful as ever but since my return I have put a stop to our association. I do not exactly know why. And I feel less solitary than before. Dokia's company is all I need during the day, and at night I remain alone, lost in the world of memory, a world ever vaster and clearer and more fascinating. In silence I rebuild my past life, and see it from afar as made up of order and beauty.

I promised Lydia my support and she left me with a smile, a new smile that plunges me back into the world of memory where she too has a place of privilege, that of my last mistress perhaps. Does she understand this? If so, it would explain the strange charm of that smile which was not designed to entice but to perfect the image I should have of her.

On my own doorstep I met Herimon. He has changed greatly during the past few months. He has grown thin and his eyes have become larger and as if concentrated on the inner flame that is devouring him.

'I have decided to put an end to it,' he said, as if continuing aloud some conversation he had been having with himself.

'Why such decisive words, my friend?'

We were walking up and down in front of my house. The scent of an apple-tree which had blossomed that very evening under the touch of spring reminded me of Scorys's orchard, and his beehives, the petals falling like snowflakes and the song of the cuckoo. Nearly a year had gone by since I was there, but that golden time is ever present in my heart.

'I am worn out,' continued Herimon. 'She has grown unbearable. She prevents me from being happy. I lose valuable time trying to calm her. I can't die in the midst of insults and reproaches.'

Herimon is a sort of poet. I realized that he was not speaking of Lydia but of his wife.

'Let her go off,' he said. 'She has a sister at Dionysopolis, let her go to her sister's. She has threatened me with this departure for years. She has only to keep her word.'

He stopped, seized my arm in his big, hot, sticky fist and hurled his decision in my face. It was like an eruption of lava, not exactly from a Vesuvius but from a noisome cellar.

'I shall marry Lydia,' he concluded.

'You've been married a long time?'

'Thirty years.'

'And yet you —'

He gave me no time to speak. 'Yes, I can do it,' he went on. 'You can think what you like, you and the citizens of Tomis and all the citizens of all the towns on the Black Sea. I don't care a damn what people say. I'm not going to die amid insults. You understand that?'

He had been drinking and was getting violent.

'I'm your friend, Herimon. I have done what I could to be helpful. Don't forget —'

'I'm not forgetting. That is exactly why I have come to see you. But don't give me advice for a gentleman, I implore you.'

His appeal surprised and touched me. In the great crises of life one dispenses with advice for gentlemen. How did I treat the counsel my friends gave me when they gathered at my house on the night of my departure from Rome? They were gentlemen, and all they were thinking of was this: 'Provided only this desperate fellow does not begin railing against

Augustus. Provided only that he doesn't compromise us this last night he is spending with us. Tomorrow he'll be far away. If only he doesn't ask us to undertake some stupid and dangerous mission which may bring down on us the wrath of Augustus.' Their gestures and consolatory words were designed to calm my anger rather than my sorrow. My tears inspired horror, as the prelude to a possible change of attitude. I did not disappoint them. But while talking now with Herimon, I regretted that on that night in Rome I had no friend like him, no one else who, not as a gentleman but simply as a man, would have said: 'Cry aloud, my friend. Your cries may reach everyone's ears, more easily than your tears. Augustus loathes those who worship him and he is terrified by all who speak the truth, who cry it aloud from the house-tops.' I should not have written the *Tristia*, but I should have gained an immortality of heroism, or at least of dignity. But no one had been there to tell me of the things that were groaning within me, bereft of any means of expression, in the midst of so many tears and so much good advice.

'I don't intend to do so,' I answered Herimon. 'I am not a gentleman. I have betrayed, and implored, and humiliated myself. I have written sublime things and abominable things. A man who knows what life really is, is not a gentleman. (I should have liked to say: "God does not love gentlemen," but I refrained.) Do not insult me, and don't be so violent.'

He loosed my arm.

'My poor friend,' I continued. 'You do nothing but think about yourself. The woman you detest at this moment and wish to abandon, you loved when you were a young man. Thirty years ago you composed verses in her honour. Have you forgotten? She took those verses seriously. You say you don't want to die amid insults and reproaches. Who would? Your wife even less than you, I can assure you. Lydia is a good sort, but she is too young to make a real wife. I mean one suited to your age. She would turn your last days into a hell, and not even know she was doing it. She was born to be a companion for joy, not for decrepitude. Remain with your wife and protect her, because she needs your care and your

love. She has never betrayed you, and it's you who are unworthy of her. Think of all this before you commit a great folly and a great injustice. And above all don't be afraid of looking facts in the face. Lydia is no more than an illusion.'

He stared at me a moment in bewilderment, then, without a word, staggered heavily away. I saw his broad shoulders, bent under their weight of misery, fade away into the grey dusk. A man bearing a burden which he could not get rid of. I was sorry for him. What is the use of advice if it does not serve to confirm our hopes and absolve our sins, to pardon our misdeeds in advance? I called out: 'Herimon!' But he was too far away; and the scent of the apple-blossom prevented my following him.



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Not to think in symbols, not to seek a meaning in everything that takes place before our eyes, not to transform signs which carry no reflection of the present into images of what will one day come about, not to mix the gods and the stories we have invented about them with everyday happenings—but how can we prevent ourselves from doing this? Our whole education tends toward a symbolism in which we strive, in our morbid vocation for the inevitable and the tragic, to discover the face of our own future. We are all little impotent Sybils, ready to translate what is into what may be. Two languages without possible correspondence exist in our consciousness and we in our anguish seek points of contact which are in fact non-existent. To know the future would be to destroy oneself, for knowledge is inseparable from death.

I was strolling on the beach this afternoon with little Dokia and 'Augustus'. These long summer days are stiflingly hot, and it is only by the sea that the air is comparatively fresh. The child is an intelligent creature, like her mother, and I find her company agreeable. Her eyes remind me of something, of someone's expression, but I still do not know who her father is, and it seems useless to try to identify the resemblance. 'Augustus' has a white coat spotted with black, and

as he roamed over the sand and among the grass-clumps he looked like a solitary lamb. He had gone off in pursuit of sparrows, his favourite game, when the eagle pounced on him. Little Dokia immediately began to run towards them, stopping only twice to pick up stones, and I, with the help of my stick, hurried after them. But the fight was quickly over. 'Augustus's' eyes had been put out and his skull shattered by the bird's iron beak and he was lying dead on the bloodstained sand. One of the eagle's legs had been broken by the dog's teeth or the stone Dokia had hurled at it; and it was hopping along on the other leg, seeking refuge among the brambles and herbage above the beach. Dokia then rushed up to me, seized my stick, ran after the bird and finished it off with a few blows, which she delivered with an energy I should never have suspected in a little girl of her age. She is in fact rather frail and timid. She then went down to the sea to wash the stick in the waves and rub it in the sand, before bringing it back to me, her eyes full of the hatred and pride of a victorious soldier. She did not say: 'Poor "Augustus",' but 'I have killed the wicked bird.' She then fled to the house to tell her grandfather.

I buried 'Augustus' deep in a sand-dune and returned home overwhelmed by the tragedy. It will prevent me from sleeping, it will people my waking hours with symbols and fill my thoughts with visions. This evening I shall write to someone—to Grecinus or Vestalis or Fabia—in order to plunge into the past and forget the afternoon's happening, which would, I confess, make me tremble with joy if I could bring myself to translate it into symbols.

* * *

The summer has lingered on this year beyond its usual limits. We are now in October and it is still very hot. In Rome the weather has been unbearable. Upper-class families, from what I am told, are still at Ostia or Baiae, fearful of returning to Rome which the heat has turned into a furnace. During one day in August sixty people were drowned in the Tiber. A

number of the inhabitants of Trans Tiberim had been so exasperated with the heat that they had jumped into the Tiber immediately after lunch, and those who escaped by swimming died afterwards of congestion. The Tiber is a god who likes human sacrifices.

In the old days when the weather was too hot I used to go to Planasia,¹ where I enjoyed the fresh air and the exquisite fruit, especially the grapes and figs. I would pass the days in bathing or in long rambles over the hills. Seen between the branches of olive or cypress, the sea looked bluer by contrast with the greenery. I loved the sea, little knowing that it was to be one day the pathway to exile. Thus life leads us to the inevitable end. If one let the mind dwell on it, the passage of time would have an odour of corruption and decay.

* * *

It is still light and I am writing in front of the open windows. The first dead leaves are falling in the garden and I can hear their rustle as they come to rest. The wind has fallen and a deep silence broods over the town. There are moments like this in autumn when the wind suddenly pauses, like a wild beast on the watch, and when men seem to hear, from a great distance, the muffled whisper of snowflakes. These are the loveliest days of the year, full of colour and expectation and gentle melancholy. Here resides their charm, here and in a quietude and suavity that are like the skin of a grape, or a nut fallen in the grass, or the over-ripe surface of a plum, or again like the flight of birds migrating to the Nile. One is aware of the passage of time but not afraid of it.

This blessed calm was shattered by a cry. It was answered by other cries which came from the harbour and grew louder as they approached. A fire must have broken out somewhere, or it is the plague, or else some other menace serious enough to make people yell like frightened animals. I wanted to get

¹ An island near Elba, in the Tuscan archipelago.

up, but the ineffable peace of the past moments was still upon me; and after all, nothing that can happen to trouble other people is of any concern to me. This moment is mine. But the nameless cry suddenly grows clear. My heart beats as if it would burst and I write down tremblingly what my ears have just heard, though my reason still refuses to believe it: 'Augustus is dead.'

* * *

From the boat which had just come in, the sailors had announced the Emperor's death even before casting anchor. This vessel brought me a long letter from Fabia. Augustus had died on the XIVth of the Kalends of September, at the age of seventy-five years, ten months and twenty-six days, after reigning for forty-five years all but thirteen days, counting from the battle of Actium. This prince whose appearance had been unhealthy and inoffensive and who had been more loath to assume power than an oriental despot, had not been an object of my love, for he had been the author of my misfortune. Yet he was at bottom merely an instrument of destiny, or of God. Thanks to him, I know myself. His cruelty sent me to Tomis and launched me on the quest of an unknown God. But for Augustus I should never have met the priest or known that moment of sublime peace which gave me a glimpse of paradise under the apple-trees of Scorys's orchard.

Here is what Fabia tells me:

Augustus had had an interview with Tiberius who, after the conquest of Illyria, had come to Italy to receive instructions and listen to advice. The Emperor was then to accompany him as far as Beneventum, the place where I bade farewell to my country nearly six years ago. Despite severe pain in the stomach, which increased during the journey, he refused to alter his plans and return to Rome. Thus he travelled down the coast of Campania, visited the neighbouring islands and stopped four days at Capri, still maintaining his good humour in face of the malady which gave him no respite. At Puteoli, where a ship from Alexandria was lying in the road-

stead, the sailors had hailed him as 'liberator' and loaded him with eulogies; and this so cheered him that he bestowed forty *aurei* on every member of his retinue and expressed the desire that the Romans accompanying him should dress in the Greek fashion and the Greeks of Capri in the Roman fashion and that each group should speak the other's language. He then, with a smile on his lips and paying no heed to the pain that was gnawing him, attended the games that the young islanders had organized in his honour. He even gave a feast for these young men, nearly all of them descendants of the ancient Greek colonists and who had preserved part of their ancestral traditions. At the end of the banquet, he ordered them to carry off the spoils, which they did, though without excess, simply taking away the fruit and other portable food-stuffs. Next day he went over to Neapolis, and disregarding his pain attended the gymnastic contests which are held there every five years in the Emperor's honour. He then accompanied Tiberius to Beneventum, where they took leave of each other.

During the return journey his malady took a graver turn and he was obliged to stop at Nola in Campania and go to bed. For some days he fought calmly against death. He asked his attendants whether the news of his approaching end was not provoking insurrections on the frontiers. Then he had a mirror brought, and ordered his hair to be combed and arranged, and his sagging cheeks to be touched up. He did not mention my name or pardon me; but he was strong enough to remark to the friends at his bedside: 'Haven't I been a good actor in the comedy of life?' and to add in Greek: 'Applaud, all of you. and clap your hands and be gay.' After which he dismissed everyone and said to Livia who was bending over to receive his last breath: 'Livia, remember our union. Farewell.' And he died without suffering.

There is however a story that, before passing away, he went through a period of delirium. Tormented in his conscience over what had happened during his long reign, he called out for help, asserting that some forty young men were lying in wait to abduct him. He died at the ninth hour of the day in

the room where his father Octavius had died. A strange coincidence.

And strange too are the rumours already circulating from end to end of the Empire, rumours that Fabia has not neglected to pass on to me. One of them contains a frightful story which I find it hard to believe, though it is worthy enough of the morals of the Court. Augustus is alleged to have taken my friend Fabius Maximus on a secret visit to Agrippa who was in exile on Planasia. This presumably happened some months before the Emperor's death. In the course of the interview Augustus not only promised to liberate Agrippa but communicated to him his last and final wishes: Tiberius was excluded from the succession and Agrippa himself was to be Emperor. On returning to Rome, Fabius is supposed to have confided the secret to his wife, Marcia, and Marcia to have passed it on to Livia. Now the Emperor's plan would have shattered what Livia was intending, because her candidate was Tiberius. Soon after this Fabius died at the hands of assassins faithful to Livia, and when he was being buried people heard Marcia lamenting and accusing herself, amid tears, of having caused her husband's death. Livia now, in alarm at Augustus's plans, is said to have hastened his end by poisoning the figs on a tree where he was accustomed to go and pick them. In any case she kept his death at Nola a secret, surrounded the house with Fraetorian guards and sent urgently for Tiberius. Augustus's decease was announced only when everything had been made ready for the accomplishment of her plans. And so Tiberius and not Agrippa is Emperor, contrary to the wishes of Augustus.

It is hard to know whether this is a true story. The life and death of princes are never exactly like what one imagines. We see them only through the medium of fables. The gods enjoy the same privilege. What is certain is that a legend of Augustus is already taking shape. Thus, his coming end had already been foreshadowed by omens. Lightning struck one of his statues some time ago, removing the first letter of his name (Caesar), which, according to the soothsayers, could only be interpreted as follows: that Augustus had only one hundred

days more to live,¹ but that after death he would take his place on Olympus, AESAR being the Etruscan word for GOD.

The more usual omens were observed by everyone. There had been an eclipse of the sun, a part of the heavens had caught fire, comets traversed the firmament dropping blood-stained fragments in their path; an owl had perched on the Curia when the Senators were voting a resolution of good wishes for the Emperor's health; and so on.

Finally, it is alleged that Livia had given a million sesterces to a Senator and Praetorian named Numerius Atticus to induce him to bear witness to Augustus's divinity. Atticus is supposed to have seen the Emperor going up into heaven, as Proculus had once seen Romulus.

Augustus's will, drawn up sixteen months before his death, is a very curious document. Tiberius and Livia were of course appointed his legatees, Tiberius for two-thirds of his fortune, Livia for one-third. Livia, in addition, was to be adopted into the *Gens Julia* and to receive the title of Augusta. The wealth of this being who was the master of the world and whose name was familiar on the furthest confines of earth, did not exceed one hundred and fifty million sesterces. He bequeathed forty million to the Roman people, three and a half million to the tribes, a thousand to each member of the Praetorian Guard, three hundred to every soldier in the legions or in the city cohorts, while his other legacies did not exceed four hundred. Among the various counsels to Tiberius which were found in the fourth annex to the will, the following in particular may be mentioned: the boundaries of the Empire were not to be pushed further afield, as they were already hard to maintain and would be further imperilled by extending them. Wise counsel for an ordinary republic or kingdom, impossible and dangerous for an empire whose *raison d'être* lay in war and conquest. The Dacians and the Greek cities on the Black Sea will soon hear about it.

The Emperor's obsequies were spectacular, long drawn-out like his life, and perfectly organized to impress the populace. And here I note a strange coincidence. Forty Praetorians came

¹ C = 100 in Latin numerals.

to move his body from the house at Nola. Now the young men whom he is supposed to have seen when he was dying, and who wanted to abduct him, had been forty in number.

The populace, who are always tearful when great men die, are already speaking of his clemency. But I happen to recall two salient facts about his early life. After the taking of Perugia, he had a hundred Senators and knights sacrificed on the altar dedicated to Julius Caesar; and when the poor *morituri* implored his pardon, he simply answered: 'You must die.' Then, after his victory at Actium, one of the wounded in the enemy camp asked if he could at least be assured of burial. Augustus replied: 'The ravens will see to that.' And what of the victims of his terror, the men he sacrificed to his perpetual dread of assassination? I also remember the praetor Gallius who had been arrested on the mere suspicion of having concealed a sword under his toga, in the Emperor's presence. The men who searched him found only two writing-tablets. The wretch was nevertheless tortured and, as he had nothing to confess, Octavius put out his eyes with his own hands and then had him slaughtered by the centurions.

He has passed his life in dread of assassination and conspiracy. Woe to those who, once under suspicion, failed to live up to his morbid illusions. He had to have victims, at every hour and at any cost, in order to banish the imaginary murderers who haunted his dreams. If at this moment he is in the presence of God, his confession will be quite a long one; and thousands of voices will rise from the dead to accuse him.

* * *

I am ready to take my last chance. Honorius has been reading me the instructions he had just received from Rome. The Greeks and the Getae of Tomis and the neighbourhood were to acknowledge the authority of Tiberius and take the oath of allegiance with all possible speed. Now if I delivered a speech to these remote peoples, if I spoke to them in barbarian verse—the verse of their own country—about the divinity

of Augustus and his sojourn among the deities of Olympus, if I eulogized Tiberius, Livia and the rest of the family, it might alter my destiny and assure me of Tiberius's pardon.

'This year, or next,' said Honorius, 'we shall have war. It is better that you should leave Tomis and your new friends here while peace still prevails. Make another effort. I advise it for your good.'

He advised me, in other words, to compose these eulogies and win over the Getae by the magic art of poetry. It was a mere formality because the Getae in Tomis and their countrymen beyond the Ister had for long past had a settled policy and paid little heed to Augustus or Tiberius. But Tomis had to follow the example of the other cities and provinces of the Empire, most of which had already taken the oath, some of them seriously, some with a mere pretence of loyalty and enthusiasm. Tiberius, however, would be notified of what was to be done here; he would hear of my eulogy and the adhesions to Rome which it would have inspired; and he would remember the unhappy poet and allow him to return to his wife's bosom.

Honorius's proposal struck me as sensible. He had behaved like a loyal friend during these latter years and my former suspicions of him had been allayed. Moreover, the complete liberty of movement he had allowed me during my visit to Histria and my travels in Dacia, his remarkable discretion and the way in which he put up with my caprices and changing moods, made him a sort of confidant and someone to lean on. I therefore agreed and set to work. To speak of Augustus and his ascent to Olympus was not easy, but the death of our most cruel enemies gradually changes hate to indifference and indifference to oblivion. Our earthly life is compounded of many passions. Only eternal life, if there be such a thing, will be concentrated on a simple feeling and a simple passion, of which the object is not in doubt. A few days ago, in the epistle to my friend Carus,¹ I explained as follows the content of my harangue in Getic verse:

'... laudes de Caesare dixi. . . ' I sang the praises of Caesar;

¹ No. XIII in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Book IV.

in this novel enterprise I was aided by his divine power. For I taught that Augustus's body was mortal, but that his divine part had been received into the heavenly mansions. I said that he was equal in virtue to his father, to him who despite himself had taken up the reins of power which he had often refused. I said that thou, Livia, art the Vesta of our chaste matrons and that we know not whether thou art more worthy of thy son or thy husband. I said also there are two young men, strong pillars of their fathers and who have already given strong pledges of valour.

These two young men, by the way, are Drusus and Germanicus, sons of Tiberius. How many lies have I written in a few verses! Poetry embraces more than the world.

I still seem to hear the long, dry rattling of the quivers full of poisoned arrows, which the Getae shook to testify their approval of my speech, in the market place at Tomis, and also to intimate to Honorius the meaning of their adhesion to the Emperor. They were all armed from head to foot and the rattling of their arrows spoke a very clear language. But Honorius made no mention of it in his report to Rome.

I feel it a duty to speak of this manifestation and also of the curious appearance of the Agora and the use it is put to on days when the Getae assemble there; because a book, especially if truthful, may often live longer than a city. An unseen struggle is being waged here between two parties which are, alas! very unequal. On one side is Greek culture which seems at first sight to be dominant, since the Getae who live in the town are gradually adopting its rules and enjoying its benefits. At the same time the Getae are constantly increasing in numbers, and the Greek language, which is being more and more corrupted, is giving place to the native tongue. Seen from outside, the city has a definitely Greek appearance, owing to its architecture, the characteristic modes of its commercial life and its general organization. But the streets are swarming with bearded Getae, and a sensitive ear quickly catches the distant roar of the rising tide, I mean of the barbarian tongue which is now spoken everywhere in the city. The Thracians and Greeks from the south, the Sarmatians

and Scythians from the north and untamed East, lastly the handful of Romans whose appearance is at once lordly and timid—all these are merely guests whose presence is tolerated, invaders who dare not openly declare themselves. The Dacians are the real masters of the country. No doubt our civilization has advantages, and the Getae know how to profit from them. They tolerate the Greeks who have contrived in a way to tame them by turning their cities into flourishing marts where the Getae come to exchange their produce. The advantage is therefore mutual. The Greeks are not imperialists. Their *dominium* does not extend beyond the ramparts of their colonies. But within these ramparts, the gymnasium, the shops and the Agora serve the convenience of both parties. I have often witnessed the judicial duels by which the Getae settle their disputes and which take place in the Agora. It is not a magistrate who pronounces judgment in these cases of litigation, as it would be in Rome or Athens, but God Himself. On a day fixed beforehand the two adversaries appear in the Forum, sword in hand, and fight until justice is done. The victor has won his lawsuit, not because he has killed or disabled his opponent, but because his hand has been guided by Zamolxis. They accept God's decision and everyone is satisfied. Everyday life is under the direct control of Heaven, even in its smallest details, whether it is a question of an acre of land or a piece of *malana*.

My *recitatio* was given at the end of November, before an armed multitude. The cold was intense, the sky covered with leaden clouds, while a few snowflakes lent an extraordinary resonance to the atmosphere. My voice seemed to echo under the sombre vault of heaven, as if I were speaking inside some great Basilica in Rome. Brown or greenish eyes, from near and far, were fixed upon me, and the beards and shaggy hair of their owners waved in the breeze like the serpents that adorn the head of Medusa. No one moved or uttered a sound. Some few hundred Greeks stood near me, muffled up in their cloaks, shivering, coughing, and whispering together. They would applaud from time to time, after a passage which they judged to be more salient or more complimentary for Augustus or

Tiberius. But I was speaking in Getic and addressing a Getic audience: they certainly formed the vast majority of those present. When my *recitatio* was over thousands of quivers began to rattle. It was as if some great river were in flood, of which the only audible sound was that of the pebbles dashing furiously against each other: a primitive clamour that had in it a note of menace and irony. The applause of the Greeks, enthusiastic and yet doubtless insincere, was drowned by the clashing of iron and wood, of which the double meaning escaped no one, and which made the Greeks smile. The Getae did not smile. With fixed eyes and impassive features they shook their quivers for some time: then the noise stopped as if at a signal and without a word to me they dispersed into the streets on both sides of the Agora, while their chieftains took the oath of allegiance in presence of Honorius.

I wrote in my letter to Carus: 'There rose a great murmur of Getic voices and one of them cried to me: "Since thou speakest thus of Caesar, thou shouldst return under Caesar's sway."' I hope my friend will show this letter to Tiberius. In the Forum where the snow was falling more and more thickly and the wind howling in that terrible way that I think I should recognize from the depths of Hell itself, no one spoke to me. The bearded faces and flashing eyes had drifted away. I remained a few minutes among the Greeks whose loyalty to Rome and the Emperor was never in doubt and whose compliments sounded ridiculous in a place which was the scene of duels in the presence of God: and finally I left, leaning on Dokia's arm and anxious only to be back at my fireside.

'You spoke very well,' said Honorius, who called on me a little later.

'Yes,' I rejoined, 'provided this poem meets with more luck than the *Tristia*! But don't forget to inform the Curia of the way the Getae applauded my discourse.'

'The rattling of quivers might be interpreted in your favour.'

'What?'

'It's quite simple. That noise meant that if, after your dis-

course, the Emperor fails to pardon you, the quivers will be emptied of arrows. You may be the arbiter of war and peace. Unfortunately,' he added with a smile, 'Tiberius is not a poet.'

And in his report he echoed what I had said in the letter to Carus and spoke of the *success* my discourse had had among the Getae. A reply will come next spring and I shall know whether Tiberius is more sensitive to my eulogies than his father was.

* * *

Since the death of my dog 'Augustus', that death so prophetic of the future, I often feel much alone at night. A distant barking is enough to awaken me with a start. On such occasions my dreams nearly always end in the same way. I think that 'Augustus' is in the street, that he has returned from a long journey, and is scratching and barking at the door. Then I rush to open it and find myself awake in the darkness. The silence of winter weighs on me like the lid of a tomb. Shadows begin to move, black clouds form round my head, I shut my eyes and once more see open squares, and streets, and forests; but the clouds pursue and lie heavy on me, without ever succeeding in crushing me. I used to have similar dreams at Sulmo between the ages of six and ten. I would wake and call my brother, who slept in a bed beside mine, or my mother who would run to me and always say the same words, which restored me to reality: 'Mother is here, don't be afraid. . . .' A mere gesture or cry or word was enough to banish every threat and dissipate every nightmare even before it could touch me. Between me and the universe an invisible wall protected me from suffering. My verses strengthened this barrier or rather they surrounded me with another kind of protection, more subtle and illusory, which I called glory and renown. My childhood terrors faded away and the heavy clouds that had oppressed my dreams vanished without any trace save that of memory. And now, after so many years, they have come back. But if I cry out in my sleep it is only

my dog's shade that comes to my aid and this aid makes me tremble. I light the little cruse that serves as a lamp, get up, replenish the fire which is nearly out and brood over my buried past.

* * *

On days when I am sick I feel more calm, in spite of pain and the fear of death, because Dokia remains by me. If I cry out in my sleep, as soon as I awake, she is at my bedside. In my dreams I am already confusing her image with my mother's.

Snow has fallen heavily this year. It covers the fence round Dokia's house, and the wolves leap over it and howl in front of the door which they try to push open with their muzzles, whimpering like hungry dogs. The tracks left by their feet are like interlacing paths, lost in the blinding glare of the snow. The hares come in the same way to gnaw the bark of the saplings that were planted in the autumn. They do more harm than the wolves, according to Dokia, because they attack noiselessly an enemy which can neither cry out nor defend itself.

Had I been younger, I should have asked Dokia to be my wife. I should have begun a new life with her beyond the Ister and written only one letter to Rome. On reading it, Augustus would have died some years before he did.

* * *

When we were returning together from Troesmis, Comozous told me the secret about the bear. This animal who lives in the mountain forests of Dacia spends the winters in a slumber so profound as to be akin to death. He goes to sleep in November, with the first snowfall, and awakens in March with the first flowers. He is like Zamolxis who had passed part of his life under the earth, in order to recover strength and to return to the world of men, full of a new wisdom. Now before the coming of Zamolxis the bears behaved like wolves; during the winter they battered on sheep and cattle; they attacked the Dacian villages and sheep-folds in large numbers. But

somehow or other they learned the art of Zamolxis and part of his teaching, because they no longer attack other animals except when driven by hunger and they prefer to live on raspberries and other woodland fruit, and they pass the winter months underground, without a sign of life. This is why Zamolxis prefers these animals to all others and it is even said that he sometimes reappears on earth in the likeness of a bear.

Am I not a bear, too, hidden away from life under the dream-blanket of the snow? Alas! I am neither a bear nor a god, because I think and weep and, amid the inner peace I have attained after so much effort, I sometimes regret the time of my ancient torments.

* * *

Theodore the physician is like a bear, with his little eyes peeping out wildly from under enormous shaggy brows, a voice that seems to come from far underground and to be reduced to saying yes or no, and a sturdy frame supported by legs that are accustomed to the soil of another planet or else to the carpet of dead leaves in the underwood. He feels your pulse with fingers that seem better made to strangle than to coax to life. He spends the day and a good part of the night in Herimon's tavern, drinking in solitude, drinking quantities of red wine and gazing through the window as if he were expecting someone's coming and at the same time were afraid of it. He studied medicine in Athens where he passed all his early life, but he has cured and killed people in Egypt and Palestine and even in the Parthian country. He has come from Dionysopolis, but appears to have no particular object. One day, without a word to anyone, he will take some boat to Histria, or to Byzantium, and disappear without a trace. He says he practises medicine in order to pay for the wine he needs. If someone calls him, he gets up grumbling and goes to see the patient, but after his visits, which are short, he returns to the tavern, slumps down in front of the wine-jar which has always been replenished, and sinks back into his

dreams and his mysterious expectation. People suppose him to have committed some misdeed and to be in fear of the vengeance of someone—the son, father or husband of his victim. But how can anyone know? He has never confessed anything since he came here and if he opens his mouth it is simply to advise his patients, which he does in a tone that admits neither of answer nor question. He despises all contact with water and the trail he leaves behind him is that of a sick he-goat. I am sorry for him because he is a good doctor and I am sure that, going to pieces as he is, his surly manner conceals some tragedy and also a desire for oblivion and the nostalgia of death.

He is full of contradictions. 'I am a Pythagorean, but I hate abstinence,' he told me on the occasion of his first visit, last winter. He despises everything under Heaven, including the Greeks and Romans, the former because they are impotent—'rotten apples'—, the latter because they are ambitious and stupidly aggressive—'rams that can see no further than their horns'.

We spent this afternoon together on the beach, strolling in the sun, sniffing the first aromas of spring and sharing our life-stories. When I told him of my journey into Dacia and my conversation with the priest, his eyes suddenly lit up. 'I too once met one of those priests,' he said. 'It was twenty years ago, in a village named Ephrata, in Palestine.' And he related the most amazing story I have ever heard. I am reproducing it here with all the details.

In 748, Theodore was a medical practitioner in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaea, where he had settled after a rather hurried departure from Alexandria.

'Some years before this,' he said, 'I had been living in Alexandria. I was still young, I had a large practice and my ideas [he alluded to his Pythagoreanism] predisposed me to the mysteries of Isis and the doctrine of rebirth. It was not that our religion did not speak to us of a future life, but the Egyptian cult furnished answers firmer and more complete, nearer also to the yearnings of my heart and the disquiet that possessed me. The multitude of gods that people Olympus

was all right for the soldiers of Menelaus, whose exploits had been sung by Homer; but a man of Virgil's time could hardly endure such a comedy and I cannot understand how a poet of his stature could bring himself to repeat humbug that was only suited to an age past and gone [he was referring to the *Æneid* and its resemblance to the *Odyssey*]. Do you see? How could I believe in Zeus, an adulterer, a god given over to sensual indulgence and even unnatural vice, when I was learning in Alexandria that God was one, although His substance was threefold? Do you know this doctrine? It is a very splendid one. The world is simply an arena in which Good and Evil stand face to face. Good will be victorious in the end, but the struggle is still going on, in Heaven, on earth and within ourselves. Osiris is Good, Set Evil. Set dismembers the body of Osiris, but Isis, who is the second person of the Trinity representing the principle of Good, recreates the body of Osiris and restores life to it. Isis is the sister and wife. But what is born again from the body of Osiris will now be Horos, the third person of the Trinity. You understand? God has neither beginning nor end, and He abides eternally by virtue of His own power. There is no difference between Father and Son, and they are identical with the Mother who restores life to each of them. The sun is the image of Osiris: he disappears simply to be born again. Isis is the vault of Heaven which receives Horos, the bridegroom risen from the dead. At the same time God conceals Himself in the form of the ox Hapi, and in this way He can keep a close watch on us so as better to know us and judge us and require us to give account of our actions, after death. God is therefore our creator, witness and judge. And man, by restoring to God what he has received from Him, namely life, will become an Osiris when he is judged worthy to be. When will that come about? If our lives were perfect, we should be received straightway into the bosom of Osiris. But we are sinners, we are expiating here below crimes we have committed in a previous existence and our reincarnations will come to an end if, by following to the letter the precepts of this cult and its initiations, we contrive one day to purify ourselves. Then indeed we shall no longer

be exiled, but beings free and eternal, and brothers of Osiris. "Have confidence"—you know the formula associated with the lotus-flower, which is the symbol of the resurrection, of perfect purity, and of the end of all reincarnations.

'I was enthusiastic. Our religion, which was merely a hymn to life upon earth, offered nothing like this. The Egyptian cult on the other hand taught me something wonderful and new. The true life was not the existence I looked on every day, the life of bodies corrupted with leprosy, degraded by the passions, humiliated by maladies and crippled by disease. There was another life beyond the frail, absurd barriers of our present one. This hope and the resurrection it implied should be our true goal. And then I made another wonderful discovery. Every man, rich or poor, king or slave, poet or soldier, carried within himself the promise of eternity. One day we should become brothers of Osiris, that is, equal. It was only during our exile here below that inequality was possible. It would come to an end as soon as our purification was fulfilled, and that moment existed potentially in every one of us: it would transform us at the last into brothers, beyond the range of war and crime and abuses and castes, and the artificial barriers that separate us in the flesh. You follow all this? It is said that Augustus had taken measures to prevent the diffusion of this teaching in Rome and the Empire generally. I can see why. By suppressing the distance between the omnipotence of the rich and the impotence of the poor, between the rights of the strong and the duties of the slave, these doctrines imperilled the Empire.'

Theodore was a long way from the tavern and the wine-jar that Herimon kept full for him. His brain was growing clearer and clearer, and he reasoned in perfectly normal and rational Greek. It was a pleasure to listen.

'I let myself be won over,' he continued, 'to principles which I thought just, noble and adapted to the age. We were living in a stifling world. Something had to happen to fulfil my expectation, something that all men had been awaiting for centuries, in fact ever since the time when they had been acquainted with suffering and death. I therefore frequented

the temples, accomplished the rites of purification, took part in processions and awaited a miracle, because the priests of this cult perform miracles. One day one of my best friends fell sick. He was an Egyptian physician, married and with six children. Medical science failed to save him and he died in my arms. I then called in the priest of the temple we used to attend—a very holy man. He applied a certain herb, three times, to the mouth of the dead, placed another on his breast, and then, turning to the East, murmured a prayer to the Sun, brother of Isis. And the dead was restored to life, there, before these very eyes which had seen him die. Do you follow? My friend was alive, he had been restored to his family by faith. This was a fact which my profession was impotent to explain. I was dazzled. Some days later I returned to my friend's house. He was still in bed but he was behaving normally, as if he had just recovered from some sickness. After asking his wife to leave us alone together for a few minutes, he said: "Pay no heed to this story. I was overcome with a sleep that seemed like death, but I was still alive, because I had a dream which I clearly recollect: a very curious dream, I admit, because instead of the faces of which one has a glimpse in sleep and which are recognizable, I saw the essence of things present and to come. I learned that the cult of Isis was a cult outworn, that its priests and priestesses are not the pure beings we imagined, and that it is too closely entangled with the nameless forces of inanimate nature that surround us. Osiris is the Sun, Isis the Moon, dispenser of wealth and abundance, of fruits and harvests. This god, one and tripartite, is not distinguishable from nature and its elements. The true God, He whom men await, will be altogether different, He will come from elsewhere and will not be like a star or an animal, but like man. Then I dreamed of you. You will have the proof, I don't know exactly what, but a proof to reveal to you and me that this dream has not been a mere dream and that truth has not yet descended among us."

These words greatly disturbed me, and I drew the following conclusion: in the first place, the priest of Isis had not performed a miracle, he had simply awakened my friend. There-

fore he had lied. He no doubt knew secrets of which I was ignorant, but he had lied in the name of his religion, which relegated him to the level of a common soothsayer. In the second place my hope, my faith and my certainties had collapsed. I needed no proof, I was already convinced. My faith had gone and a great despair had taken possession of me. What I am telling you is perhaps too much generalized, but I am sure you understand me. What was the use of a proof, if everything suddenly dissolved, like a grain of salt under a drop of water? But the proof came of itself, to confirm the prophetic words of my Egyptian friend.

'It was one fifth of March, the Festival of the Vessel of Isis, which is so important in Alexandria for the many sailors there and other devotees of the goddess. They were consecrating a new vessel for Isis, a vessel which would then be launched and sent out to sea. I was present at the ceremony, near where the priests were assembled. A vast multitude surrounded the Lighthouse, the altar and the vessel. Fervent prayers were offered up for those who would be putting to sea during the season which opened that day, the vessel was launched, and then---just at that moment---from the low clouds that covered the sky, a thunderbolt descended like a long sword of blinding intensity, and fell straight upon the sacred vessel. And the vessel caught fire and disappeared under the waves, leaving behind it only a few vague gleams and wisps of smoke. A clap of thunder followed, and the rain came down in torrents. The crowd was seized with panic some fell into the sea, others were trampled underfoot in the stampede. The priests fled. It was then that a priestess of Isis took refuge in my arms. I carried her to my home, where she remained. Two days later, when the tempest had died down, we decided to leave the city. We embarked together on the first boat that was sailing for Palestine. She had fallen in love with me, and all night long she told me of what used to be done in the temple. Why should I repeat her words? Every one of them was for me a symbol of the truth.

'We settled in Jerusalem, where Herod was reigning. I was not rich, and when my small savings were exhausted she

deserted me, to return perhaps to Alexandria, or else to go to Athens or Rome, which had been her dream. This was in 748, in the month of December. If you asked me what she was like, I really couldn't tell you. Young and beautiful, yes, but her face, the colour of her eyes and hair, and the shape of her nose—all that has escaped my memory. She had been only an instrument of destiny, or of God, and her mission once accomplished, she had disappeared. I once again went into practice and had a number of patients. One day I was summoned to the bedside of a sick man, who lived in the village of Ephrata, or Bethlehem, a few miles south of Jerusalem. The place was packed: people from all sides had come to enrol in the new census, according to instructions from Rome.'

Theodore fell silent: his tongue must have been parched.

'I'm hot,' he said, as he went to cool his feet in the sea. 'How cold this water is! But let us stay on the beach. I have no desire to go in. Herimon disgusts me, though his wine is good.'

We continued to stroll, silently for a time, on the golden sand which warmed our feet through the soles of our shoes.

'I had been sleeping in my patient's house,' Theodore went on, 'and I was just packing my bag, as I had to return next day to Jerusalem, when an old woman came to look for me. She took me by night to the other end of the village, to a rather isolated house, where I had to lance a gangrene and remain more than an hour. I left a little before midnight, and resolved to dispense with a guide because the lights in the village were quite clear and there was no risk of missing one's way. So I plunged into the darkness. There was no moon but thousands of stars shone in the sky, and I seemed to feel their rays quivering in the pure, cold air. I pursued my way, humming to myself, along the white high road. Now this road, before disappearing among the first houses of the village, climbed slightly on a curve from which one could look down on the low hills round Ephrata. Not that I was thinking of contemplating these hills, because I was cold and tired and, as always happened during these first months in Palestine when I was

alone, I saw only the image of the woman who had deserted me and whose memory was still an obsession: not because I had loved her and was mourning her absence, but because I felt too lonely, without a companion, as any man will feel if he has been betrayed almost simultaneously by his mistress and his gods. I was strong, but the blow had been a hard one. It was then, at the moment when the road began to climb and hid the few scattered lights of the village, that I saw the star. It was on my right in the open sky but lower than the other stars, and it was moving slowly, leaving behind it a kind of luminous dust which dissolved like smoke in the air. I halted in order to observe it. And at that moment the star also came to a stand or rather it interrupted its horizontal movement and began to descend. As it descended I could discern the outline of the hills, white under the starlight, as if there had just been a snowfall. Two peasants, or shepherds, crossed the road at that moment, a few paces ahead of where I had halted, and without seeing me they moved on in the direction of the star. I followed them at a distance, inconspicuously. Now the star, or what I took for one, had come to a stand some sixty feet perhaps above a hill, on the side of which I saw another but much paler light. On approaching I discovered that it shone from the entrance to one of those caves where the Palestinian peasants keep their flocks in winter. Nine or ten people on their knees were gazing into the cave, and the cave itself was full of other people, men and women, motionless in the same attitude. Someone who saw and recognized me—no doubt a relative or friend of the patients I had tended during the day—cried out: "Here is the doctor. He has come too late."

"What is happening?" I asked, in some alarm at these words.

"The Messiah has been born" they replied.

I made my way among the kneeling figures, and then I saw Him. Lying in the manger of that stable, hollowed out of the hillside, He was asleep. His mother—you understand, His mother, for the Messiah is born of woman, like all the children of men—was lying on the straw, exhausted by the

pain of the delivery which must have taken place an hour or even less before my arrival. I could hear the sound of a chain through a ring which an ass was moving from time to time and the noise animals make as they chew the cud, something like the purring of a cat. An old man approached and asked me gently: "Who summoned you here?"

"I came alone, following the star. I am sorry I have come too late, though I can see that my presence would have been useless. But why here?"

"We could find no room in the village. All the rooms are taken."

"I can give you mine," I answered. "It will be free to-morrow morning. I will come for you."

'At that moment the child opened his eyes and looked at me. Those eyes could already see—I can swear to it—and they were full of gratitude—yes, I can swear to that too—as if he were grown up and conscious of what he was doing. And the peace that filled the cave entered into my soul. I knelt down, weeping for joy, with my head pressed against the warm flank of one of the animals that were watching the Messiah.'

Theodore had stopped again. He had seized my hand with his own, which was trembling. A sob came from his lips, his eyes filled with tears and he began to cry like a child, shaken by the violence of the happiness which had overwhelmed him on the night when the Messiah had been born. Then he grew calm and resumed his story.

'On going out I saw on the threshold the Dacian priest, who was wearing a long white tunic. He had just arrived: his eyes, dazzled and incredulous, were seeking a confirmation in mine. So I nodded. He understood what I meant and entered the cave, while I walked away in the starlight which was as clear as if there had been a full moon.

'To my host I said nothing about this experience. I merely asked him to give shelter for a few days to a family who were my friends and who could find no lodging. I paid him what he asked in advance. Next day I went to fetch the child and his mother, and the old man who was with them, and I took them to my former patient's house.

'How can I explain what I then felt, a joy mingled with indescribable fear? Why a child, a being so frail and delicate? And why the stable and the oxen and the poverty-stricken shepherds? Why had God chosen just that place and that poverty to manifest Himself to men? Something in me rebelled against the simplicity of the miracle. And then how could I explain and justify my presence at the door of this house, behind which, when I listened, I could hear the infant's cries and the voice of his mother? Ought I to do something, to behave differently from the way I had behaved in the past, to return maybe to Alexandria and proclaim the good news before the temple of Isis and all the other temples raised to lying gods? And I also asked myself: how was the Messiah going to make manifest to men His power and His will? Would He perform dazzling miracles straight away, or was He going to wait months and even years until He became a man like other men, before speaking and revealing His power? I might die in the interval, before I had heard the word so long awaited. And then, in the midst of my dilemma, I saw what I had to do. I had, from that moment, to follow the Messiah, never to leave His side, to become His physician, although indeed, when one thought of Him, the term had lost any real meaning. I decided therefore to return to Jerusalem, to collect what few belongings I had acquired since that woman's flight, come back to Bethlehem, live in the society of the holy family until the day when the truth should be revealed to men, and when I should be the first to hear it from the lips of the Messiah Himself.

'Before setting off, I spoke with the Dacian priest. He knew very little Greek, but I could understand him. He had seen the star and recognized the sign, because the coming of the Messiah figured among his traditional beliefs. The new-born babe, he told me, was the Son of God, and Mary had given birth to him without having known any man, for the young woman was named Mary and the old man who was with her and whose name was Joseph, a descendant of King David, was her husband; but he had never touched her, obedient as he was to the command that God had given them in advance by the

mouth of an angel. While the priest and I were talking, three camels stopped in front of the house and three strangers, arrayed in Persian garb, dismounted and saluted us. They asked us in Aramaic whether the Messiah was in that house, since they were bringing Him gifts. They were Magi, or disciples of Zarathustra and they too had been following a star. Their books spoke of the coming of the Saviour, the *Astvat-ereta*, son of Zarathustra, who would raise the dead, be the judge of all men who have lived on the earth and assure the final triumph of Good over Evil. All the signs showed that the Son of God had been born and that mankind was about to enter a new era. They also told us that in Jerusalem nothing was yet known of this event. They had even called at the court of Herod and spoken with the king. The latter had expressed a desire to know the Messiah and adore Him; and they had promised to bring him news of the Messiah on their return journey.

'After this we parted, and they went in to present their gifts to the Messiah. I on my part saluted the priest and left for Jerusalem, where I intended to wind up my business so as to return as soon as possible to Bethlehem.'

Theodore sat on the beach and looked out to sea. For some minutes he stayed motionless, chewing a stalk of grass he had plucked. Then he continued his story :

'No, you can't imagine what happened next. I remained three or four days in Jerusalem, where the news had already been noised abroad. You have heard of Herod, the man who killed his wife and his sons, the cruellest and most ignoble king in the sorry story of all the kings of the earth. He was old now, a stinking wreck of a man, and he had been reigning for many, many years, playing the game of the Romans, killing and pillaging in order to preserve his crown. I heard one evening from a patient of mine, who happened to be Captain of the Palace Guard, that Herod had decided to order the death of the child who had just been born at Bethlehem. A little later Herod died, eaten of worms, in his palace at Jericho; but some five days before this he had killed his eldest son, Antipatros, for fear of being dethroned. In fact he sowed death and

terror about him up to the last moment. It was clear therefore that he feared the Messiah would dispossess him and take his place as king of Jerusalem.

'I rushed to my lodging, caught up the travelling-bag I had packed, hired a horse and set off to give the alarm to Joseph and Mary; and of course to facilitate their flight and never to leave them. But they were not there. They had been warned by someone, perhaps by God Himself, and had disappeared the previous night. Herod's soldiers had surrounded the village and were already searching the houses. Women were tearing their hair and shrieking; I saw one of them kill with a stone a soldier who had just run his sword through an infant born a few days earlier; because all the new-born children were massacred on Herod's orders. Some score of them were put to death in this way, in the crazy hope that the Messiah would be among them. But he was already far away. He had escaped the massacre and I had lost all trace of Him. And since then I have never found Him. I have sought Him everywhere, in Palestine, in Egypt and Greece, I have followed the same route dozens of times, but no one could tell me which way He had gone. People would look at me in amazement: 'The Messiah?'; and then shake their heads. I probably looked like a madman, exhausted as I was by riding so many miles, my beard caked with dust, a look of despair in my eyes, haunted for ever by the memory of that first night. I had found God and I had lost Him. I had seen Him, lying on the straw, warmed by the breathing of the animals. He had gazed at me for a moment and His glance has remained in my mind's eye like a beacon of light. I am still looking for Him, and consoling myself as well as I can. A glass of wine is enough to bring back the memory of the cave. Time passes slowly, it crawls instead of speeding towards the hour when the child, who is now a young man of twenty, will speak to men and call me to His side. He will surely remember me, don't you think?'

Theodore fell silent. He looked at me, but my mouth was trembling as in a fever.

'What is wrong? Are you ill?' he asked.

'I don't want to die. I don't want to die. . . .' I repeated these stupid words, which were the only response I could think of to the physician's question. I too wished to hear that word, I wished to see the Messiah and, before dying, hear the answer to all my doubts. God was already among us and He was going to make His voice heard at any time now. Everything would be ordered in obedience to a new law, everything in life would have a meaning, men would know the truth and death itself would be a joy. The Dacians knew something of this, but all the doctrines and all the wisdom of men would henceforth be a dead letter.

Night was drawing on. As we made our way back I invited Theodore to dinner. My hand still trembles as I write these lines. I shall remain awake all night. Supposing the Messiah were at Tomis? Or why not at Kogaionon, or in the Glade of the Apple Tree? That perhaps was why the Dacian priest sent me away from the Sacred Mountain. But that can hardly be. After the death of Herod, the Messiah certainly returned to Palestine, where His human destiny had begun. Or will His voice be heard in Rome, at the heart of the world, where no one was expecting Him but where His words would at once fill the universe?

* * *

Theodore left this morning for Rome, after promising to write as soon as he got there. My notion he thought logical; for what the Messiah will destroy as soon as He shows Himself to men will be the Empire.

SIXTH YEAR



Writing has become more and more painful. When I was a young man, writing was a joy. Everything I touched on, things, men and gods, turned into poetry and happiness. The world seemed to be unaware of tragedy. Death in my eyes was a mere abstraction and, as far as I was concerned, inconceivable. But now that I am old everything I touch becomes tragedy, even the things that do not concern me, even other people's stories. Death is signing to me, he is using those I meet to announce his presence at every hour, so that everything round me is no more than a world fashioned in the image of Death. And this is why writing becomes for me a source of sadness. Every letter I pen marks a step nearer the end, a minute less to live.

How can I relate all that has happened in these last few months? How can I not ask for some kind of consolation, as poor Herimon used to do, some means of forgetting, love for example, or (if there were such a thing) a draught of the dark waters of Lethe? Theodore called his red wine 'my Lethe': he at least had found a way. I should like to relate what has happened to Herimon, but I have not the strength to do so. I have already tried, but without success, because again I am responsible. . . . Let me speak of a less terrible subject. I have just received a letter from Theodore, the man who had found God and lost Him again so quickly.

'I had scarcely reached your city,' he writes, 'before I called on your wife, who received me very kindly. She kept me for several hours and so I was able to give her all the news for which she was so anxious. She is continually pleading on your

behalf with Tiberius and the great men of the Empire and she tells me that during these latter months your chances of returning have improved, although indeed nothing has changed in Rome since the death of Augustus. Tiberius had to be urged and pleaded with for days before agreeing to accept the succession, and he shammed to an extent that might have cost him dear, because the Senators, encouraged by his hesitation, were inclining to favour a return to the Republic. It seems however that under Augustus the Romans have lost all decent pride and that the Empire is already a part of their tradition; because no one dared oppose Tiberius when he ceased acting and accepted the heavy burden, to deprive the Romans of the liberties that Augustus had taught them to forget. Even so, your wife tells me, Tiberius seems disposed to forgive you, and as soon as a favourable opportunity occurs, she will solicit your pardon. So I shall have the joy of seeing you again before long.

‘I asked her about the Messiah, but she had heard nothing and it appears that the news of His birth has not yet reached the circles she frequents. She immediately put me in touch with her physician, Antonius Musa, and I went to see him a few days ago. No doubt you remember him. He is still the most famous doctor in Rome and his bronze statue still stands beside that of Æsculapius.’

Certainly I remember him. Musa was already renowned in Augustus’s time, when he recommended the sick Emperor to take cold baths. Augustus got better immediately and a grateful people erected in the doctor’s honour the statue Theodore speaks of. Some time after this, Musa prescribed the same cure for Augustus’s nephew, Marcellus, who immediately died of it. But his glory, which was now undeniable, survived the little setback. To continue Theodore’s letter:

‘He at once asked me: “Is it a question of a healer?”

“Of a healer of souls,” I answered. “The Messiah is the Son of God.”

“Bah! Anyone can see that you come from the East. Gods spring up there like mushrooms. What counts is the body. If men ever came to worry more about their souls than their bodies, the doctors could close shop and change their trade.”

‘“The Messiah,” I observed, “will cure bodies too. He will raise the dead.”

‘“Still worse, my dear colleague. I don’t even want to hear about him. If he ever shows himself in Rome, I will have him expelled or imprisoned.”

‘Musa, who had in fact been excited by what I told him, sent one of his slaves to escort me to the house of Herophilus, the famous enemy of death. Did you know him? I wonder. The doctor who up to now has dissected six hundred human bodies.’

No, I had not known Herophilus. No doubt another Greek doctor, one of the thousands of charlatans in Rome who, under the protection of the law, were practising a science of which they were ignorant or of which they managed to acquire some knowledge after killing a hundred patients in order, in the end, to save one or two.

‘I found him at home,’ wrote Theodore, ‘fully occupied. To please his friend Musa, and also to dazzle me with his art, he took me up to his laboratory, a vast room at the top of the house, unroofed so that the light could fall unimpeded on the object of his deep and learned research.

‘“The Messiah, the Messiah? What are you talking about? What use is all that, my dear colleague? One must consider things as a doctor, not as a prophet. There are no more mysteries in the world. Everything is here, before our eyes, and I hope soon to be able to reveal the secret of life and death. Just look here.”

‘On a stone table the body of a living man lay stretched out. His feet and hands firmly tied down, his mouth gagged with a piece of material that prevented his crying out, his stomach cut open—this man was suffering in the name of the future revelation which the doctor had promised. Bloodstained saliva was flowing down both sides of his face and falling on the stone slabs below. Herophilus went on with his work. Using instruments of his own invention, my colleague was trying to discover the secret of life and death in the entrails of this man, who was one of the ten criminals that a barbarian king had sent to Herophilus to be used in his experiments. This was

the homage of barbarism to science. By some technique which he did not explain to me, the doctor was prolonging the death agonies of his victim to the greatest extent possible, so that his research should not be interrupted by an untimely decease. If the poor wretch lost consciousness, he lavished on him the greatest care in order to bring him back to life. And if he failed to discover the secret in the entrails, he would open the chest, the genital organs, the head and even the muscles of the legs and arms. One never knows. . . . After two hours of research alternating with remedial measures, the criminal expired, abruptly ceasing to groan and struggle. Herophilus struck him with the scalpel and by way of farewell hurled a Greek oath at him.

‘“The pig is dead. I have six others awaiting their turn. Now if some day I should find your Messiah . . .” He threw me an eloquent glance. The Messiah had become in his mind the body in which he would doubtless find the secret he had so long pursued. This sham scientist who believes in nothing except the ambition which devours him like an eczema, is a living proof of the approaching end. The world has sunk too low. The human being whom I had seen dying under the knife of a brutal lunatic had no one to defend him. Herophilus had killed six hundred men like him and others were awaiting their turn in the slaves’ prison. There was no one to defend him because no Roman would have raised a hand to oppose the massacre. In the days of my youth medical practice was very different. Asclepiades had recourse to music to treat cases of maniacal frenzy, and used the mildest remedies for his patients.’ [Theodore is right. Before the first Greek doctor came to Rome, in 535, there existed a Temple of Fever at the upper end of the Vicus Longus. Here people who were recovering from some malady or other would come and relate the means they had used to get rid of it, to give the names of plants and unguents, and explain in detail the cure they had followed, so that others in their turn might utilize it. One still thought of other people’s health and was happy to make oneself useful. But in our days people torture men in order to drag from the body a secret which will never be discovered in this way. I

can imagine a future age when men will be so perverted by science that they will try to wrest the secret of life not from the body but from the soul. New Herophiluses will dispose of thousands of slaves whose death agonies will, thanks to progress, be much longer and whose sufferings will destroy in men's consciences the very notion of humanity. But God, if He exists, will never allow such a crime.]

'When I think,' continued Theodore, 'that the Son of God is among us, and perhaps even in Rome, I become wild with rage. If I told Him of Herophilus's wicked folly, it might decide Him to appear and to speak. What is He waiting for? I ask myself every day. What is He still waiting for?'

Theodore's quest had been fruitless up to the moment when he wrote to me. No one in the capital knew of the Saviour. There was talk of Him in Jewish circles in Rome, but of the event at Bethlehem no one had heard.

The circle is closing in about me.

* * *

Herimon has killed his wife, and I am the only person to know it. At last I have been able to write it down. It happened over a month ago, one March evening when the first spring zephyr was murmuring in the rooftops and awakening men's passions, like bears who had long slumbered through the winter's cold. Dokia had left for her house a few minutes before and I was getting ready for bed when the door resounded under the blows of my friend's fist, of which I well know the violence. He came in without saluting me, and he evaded my eyes.

'My wife is dead. She fell down the staircase.'

I had no doubt as to what had happened.

'You pushed her?' I said.

He made no reply, but his silence was enough for me.

'And now what do you think of doing?'

'I shall marry Lydia, renovate the house, buy new furniture and begin a new life. I regret nothing. Her useless suffering was too painful for me. Her death has freed both of us.'

I'm not happy yet, but I can assure you I shall be. You will not denounce me, I know, because you are my accomplice.'

'Your accomplice?'

'Don't you remember you wrote that poem for me? That was when everything began. Excuse my speaking to you so frankly. I didn't wish to appeal to your complicity but to your friendship. You cannot be the cause of my misfortune. A poet is incapable of working evil.'

He was contradicting himself.

'You regard me as your accomplice, and therefore I am one of the causes of this evil.'

'A remote and indirect cause. You put me on the road to happiness and thanks to your support I won Lydia. The evil that has followed derives from this happiness. I had to choose between two bad deeds: to destroy my love and separate from Lydia, or to kill my wife so that my love might not perish. I chose the easier and more human crime. Would you have chosen the other?'

'I have always avoided these dilemmas.'

'Very convenient. You are a civilized person. You have cleansed yourself of all the passions that soiled your heart, and your life has been easy and clean. You have been satisfied with watching other people's torments and writing poems about them. But I, who was born among the barbarians, on the outer frontiers of rational existence—I have taken what consolation was in reach, without thinking twice about it. Does that make me unworthy to live? Haven't I the right, like everybody else, to be happy at any cost? Have I lost your friendship by my crime?'

'No, Herimon. I shall always be here to console you, because your crime will not increase your happiness but your suffering.'

He glanced at me suspiciously, not understanding.

'You won't denounce me?'

That was all he managed to say, it was the only thing he had at heart at the moment. He thought his freedom depended on my silence. I shook my head. But he ran out, convinced that he had secured my complicity.

Carmen et error had been the reasons for my exile. My poetry had provoked Augustus's anger. It was corrupting the young Romans and, according to him, threatening the very existence of the Empire. And now I am again being accused, this time of complicity in a crime. My first poem in Getic rendered possible the love of Herimon and Lydia, and at the same time launched my friend down the slope of blind and sterile passion. He secured the young woman's favours and entered on a period of happiness which was the keener and more torturing as he believed it to be the last. How could he prolong it without further risk? By eliminating the only obstacle, namely his ailing old wife. By pushing her down the staircase—probably without her being aware of it—he had, according to his theory, performed two good actions. At one stroke he had put an end to his wife's sufferings, death being now the only possible relief for her (Theodore had tried in vain to cure her), and he had removed an encumbrance from his path. He had money and was now a widower: therefore he supposed he was on the threshold of perfect bliss. If, like Augustus, he could rid himself of my presence, he would exile me to the ends of the world, because the sight of me will always remind him of this wrong, or error, which will bring down his fragile illusion in ruins. What is sad about all this is the share that is attributed to me. Has my levity once again led me to commit an offence of which I could not foresee the outcome and ultimate consequences? Is it the *Ars amatoria* which has spoiled everything in my life? Am I really responsible? Herimon was not mistaken when he accused me of having led the life of a civilized person who has looked on at other people's torments. He might even have added: and who, by my poetry, has given rise to those torments. But can one be responsible for the weapons that have been put in one's hands at birth, without one understanding their bearing or their power? Which of us three was truly responsible for the death that has taken place? Lydia by her youth and beauty which awakened a blind and guilty passion in her lover? I by the verses that enabled the lovers to reveal their feelings and belong to each other? Or Herimon, when he pushed his wife

down the staircase? And now I am assailed by another doubt. How many other people have my verses ended by perverting? How many other men will Lydia's beauty end by polluting? Seen in this light, Herimon's action loses its prime importance and the criminal becomes the most innocent of the three accomplices. And who can judge our offence and assign the right degree of punishment, now and in eternity?

* * *

I have had another letter from Theodore, this time full of hope.

'I have once again picked up the clue,' he writes. 'My enquiries led me to the house of an old Jew who felt no surprise at the news. The Jews have always been awaiting the advent of the Messiah. He read me the following passages, which I quote from memory. They occur in one of their sacred books, which they call *Genesis* and *The Book of the Prophets*. The Messiah will be born of the tribe of Judah and the house of Jesse; His mother will be a virgin. His birthplace will be Bethlehem Ephrata (no doubt you remember the name of the village where I saw Him, just after His birth). He will be the son of God Almighty. He will be the prince of peace and the spirit of the Lord will be always upon Him. He will perform miracles, be teacher and prophet, lawgiver and ruler of the new kingdom. He will be at once priest and victim. He will be sold for thirty pieces of silver, according to the prophet Zechariah. He will be scourged and tortured, men will spit in His face, His hands and feet will be pierced and when He says He thirsts, they will give Him gall and vinegar. He will be buried in the rich man's sepulchre. But His flesh will not see corruption and His kingdom will be universal.

'This is what the prophets of Israel say and what the man I have spoken of read to me from his books. At the end of our conversation he added: "I know that He has been born and is living in Galilee. It is there that He will speak to men."

'I shall be in Galilee when this letter reaches you. I leave tomorrow for southern Italy where I shall take ship to Pales-

tine. You must excuse me for not keeping my promise: I shall not wait for you in Rome, as I wrote before, but you will soon have news of me. Your brother in God, Theodore.'

My brother in God. This unforeseen expression opened my eyes to a new vision of the world. I had no blood relationship with this Greek whom I had sometimes encountered at Tomis, but who, because he recognized in me certain traits we had in common and the same thirst for liberation that was consuming him, had told me his life-story and revealed to me the greatest secret of the ages. I had become his brother. And henceforth the same bonds united me to Mucaporus, to the Dacian priest, to Corinna, to all in fact who dwelt in expectation. A slave or a barbarian could also have become my brother, since all barriers between men were suddenly grown ridiculous. Except as regards the Caesars and men who killed. Will Herimon be excluded by his crime from this brotherhood? Or will suffering, that gift unknown to the Caesars of this world, have expiated his offence? Have I known suffering? Exile and this secret journal are in my eyes the only proofs of my having a part in salvation.

* * *

I have been thinking a great deal of Theodore's last letter. From what I have understood, the Messiah's suffering will be the foundation of the kingdom of which the prophets spoke. He will be scourged. His hands and His feet will be pierced—by weapons, by a spear, by arrows or by nails—men will spit in His face. . . . Therefore men will not recognize Him as the son of God, and He will be condemned to death by some Herod or by Caesar's envoy, and He will die, but His flesh will not see corruption and, after this death which will not be death like other deaths, His kingdom will spread over the whole earth. I have difficulty in imagining this story which is made up of incongruous fragments and will not be like any other story. It will be the story of the son of God; of His sojourn among men; of His human servitude; of the strife between the call of the flesh and the call of the divine; of His words which

will bring Him disciples but will not convince the representatives of the established order, or of the Empire and its protectorates. The man-Messiah, victim of Caesar, whose representatives will regard Him as a dangerous rival. The repetition of Herod's action, of his fear. What will the Messiah say to men, and in what language will He speak to them? And where, and when?

Everything else has suddenly become terrifyingly trivial. One hour of today takes on the aspect of eternity in face of all the years of my past life. And all my work, everything I have thought and written, apart from this journal, crumbles away under my fingers like a statue made of sand. How could I now write the *Ars amatoria* after having heard Him speak? The love I sang of is not love. I should like to be strong enough to sing of my love for Dokia, because it is not her body I desire, but something I have always loved in her, and which was like an announcement of the present time. And what of the *Metamorphoses* in which I collected all the errors of a world that is dying? I used to think that the gods could change us into animals or plants or rocks. All that has ceased to be possible. The true God has taken our flesh upon Him. He has changed Himself into a man, not so that His flesh might enjoy the pleasures of mortals, but that He might suffer and make us understand that we resemble Him in sorrow. Inanimate things and animals were in some sort like the false gods of the past, like all those faults which, if they remain possible in the future, will be witnesses to our shame and will serve better to define our crimes and offences in face of the perfection that will be required of us. And the *Fasti*, in which I sang the glories of Rome and how she would last for ever, will soon have no more worth than that of a passing wonder, of something that, in the course of one season, marks the scarce visible trace of a fading shadow. And as to my *Tristia* and my *Epistulae ex Ponto*, how pitifully absurd the grief they express, how futile my humiliation in face of a sham god whose decaying body is worth no more than the body of any tyrant who is more or less of a visionary! The story of all this corruption will engender corruption. I shall survive my works

only on the supposition that, amid all the true knowledge that will be given to men, they preserve the pleasant and useless vice of curiosity. If, on the other hand, someone discovers this journal, he will be able to share in the torments and hopes of the unique age in which we are living: the age of expectation and certainty. It is only a moment in time, I know that, but it is one of the finest in the history of men, for God is now among us and He has not yet revealed His presence. This moment will pass and then we shall have only certainty.

* * *

A conversation with Dokia. She calls Him 'the son of Zamolxis'. She understood at once, better than I did. I told her what Theodore had learned from the books of the Prophets, in Rome, and I spoke to her of the miracle of the Messiah's flesh, which is immortal.

'Certainly,' she replied, 'because He will return to His Father.'

That is her way of interpreting the prophecy of the Jewish books, something which I personally had been unable to express in words. The Messiah, while a man, will dwell among us for the space of a man's life, and will then return to His eternal life, with His Father. It is both tragic and simple. But a logical mind is incapable of formulating so dazzlingly clear a revelation.

Dokia has doubts of Herimon's innocence. 'He is an unhappy wretch. He must be suffering a great deal, because what he has done is irreparable and Lydia will not be able to make him forget the crime. On the contrary, her presence will constantly remind him of the fall down the staircase. He wanted to drown all memory in love, and now he will be tormented by memory. And the memory of what a deed! He's an unhappy wretch. Death has already set its mark on his eyes.'

I too had seen this. Herimon has now only one chance, to drown everything in oblivion, and this is reflected in his eyes. It hurts me to see him. He has closed his shop and retired from business, ostensibly to lament his wife's death in peace. No

one here, except Dokia, suspects him. But the truth is, that he is incapable of devoting himself to anything except his despair which he still confuses with the hope of living happily with Lydia. Now I have the impression that she too is avoiding him because her feminine intuition leaves her in no doubt and she certainly feels a horror of him. Herimon's hands frighten her, more no doubt than his eyes, because they are the hands of a murderer.

* * *

Honorius had already given me the bad news, but it was my friend at Histria, Dionisodor, who furnished the details. Dionisodor has been at Tomis for two days, on his way to Athens. The war—a war 'between you and us', between the Romans and Dacians—broke out a few weeks ago and the last battles leave no doubt as to who will win. The Getae had made a surprise attack on Troesmis, which fell into their hands; the Romans and Thracians took flight or were massacred. Were my friends taking part in the assault? It is quite possible. In any event, their victory was of short duration. Pomponius Flaccus, the governor of Moesia, laid siege to the town, in which the Dacians had fortified themselves. He recaptured it, in spite of a long and stern resistance. Comozeus, Scorys and my other friends, if still alive, must have fled across the Danube and once again taken the road I knew so well, toward the shelter of the hills. But before long, I think, the desire for revenge will inflame them, and other Dacians will perish in battle.

Rome has just, since this victory, established a new military command to defend the whole region, including Tomis, Histria, Troesmis, Noviodunum and all the towns situated between the sea and the Danube: all this country will be placed under the jurisdiction of the new command. The general, who will be responsible to the governor of Moesia, will have the title of *praefectus orae maritimae* or of *praeses laevi Ponti* and will himself be appointed governor of the shores of the Black Sea and the mouths of the Danube. The

country in the interior will remain as before under the control of the Thracian king. A Roman war fleet is already cruising in the lower waters of the Danube. No one now can prevent our pushing the conquest still further. It would be enough for a new Augustus or a new Julius Caesar to become master of Rome, for the legions to cross the Danube and transform the land of the Dacians into a Roman province, traversed by splendid roads, incorporated into the civilized world and deprived of liberty.

Dionisodor tells me that thousands of Dacians perished in this local war, which is really only a beginning. He says that the women fought side by side with their husbands under the walls of Troesmis, and that the fighting went on in the streets and in the houses. Women, carrying their children, threw themselves into the Danube, to escape slavery. To *forget defeat*, according to Herimon's expression.

So Mucaporus will have to seek another place of refuge, since Roman garrisons will be stationed at Tomis and Histria. He will have to abandon his cottage and the beach between the sea and the lagoon, and build himself another home beyond the frontiers of the Empire which the soldiers have again crossed. He will have to make his way northward, cross the Danube and set his face toward other horizons, further and ever further from the Roman sea. His journey will be without respite, because empires have no limits in space, and henceforward no forest-clearing, no ploughed field and no homestead will enjoy security. And liberty will not be possible until the day when the Messiah speaks and confides to men the secret of how, under the threat of empires, they may be free in another way, without ever feeling the need to fly.

The Empire has produced two new kinds of slaves. First are the foreigners who have been vanquished and lost their independence. Stripped of their positions and often of all their property, they are wandering inside the Empire, settling in Rome in quest of a new career and new horizons, anxious to forget what their souls and bodies have been forcibly deprived of: their property and the dignity and freedom of their past. These men who are apparently accepting the new order and

who seem to wish to get used to it, are enemies of Rome. Stronger and more intelligent than actual slaves, they will increase in number and power as conquests are pushed further afield. The second kind of men I mentioned are the foreigners who do not accept the consequences of defeat and who move their household gods beyond the range of peril. These men, who are the boldest among the vanquished, will become the friends of our enemies. One day they will knock on the gates of Rome.

Dionisodor has brought me the news of Histria. I should like to ask him about the young slave-girl from Noviodunum, but dare not. We converse like old friends, on matters of indifference. He is a cultured man, his manners are faultless, his dress fashionable and meticulous: it is a pleasure to see him again. But how distant seem the days I passed at Histria; and all the events connected with them! Dionisodor speaks, I smile and I try not to show that my thoughts are elsewhere. But now and again I am assailed by doubts. Who is this man? What does he want of me? What is this house, and what am I doing here? I ought to be somewhere, but where on earth ought I to be?

We take leave effusively. I close the door behind him, and then I want to collapse and to have done with everything. What is the use of going on with the play? The audience is tired, too. I feel more and more alone on the stage and I think that the part I have been playing for so long does not really fit me, that it was not written for me. To abandon the stage and escape from playing this part is therefore the only chance that destiny still offers me. Yet the present moment does not depend on me. It will be shown me what I must do, on a day when I shall perhaps not like it, when I may find that I do like the part I have been playing.

Dokia is calling me to come to dinner. To see her is all I need in order to feel joyful once again.

* * *

My mind has often dwelt on that Dacian priest of whom

Theodore told me. His face, even his outline, are confused in my memory with those of the priest who spoke to me in the Glade of the Apple Tree. Was it the same man? Surely not; because the Messiah was born twenty years ago and Theodore spoke of a priest who was old at that time. The priest I met was old, too. No, it is not possible. But for me, it was the same priest. He had gone to Bethlehem, guided by the star, to worship Him who was to be the Saviour of men. Twenty years later he had received me in his own country, he had restored my peace of soul by speaking only a few words, the words of the certainty he had gained when he looked on the child whom Theodore had seen in the manger. Unlike the Magi, he had not visited Herod, because the star had guided him to the end and he had reached the cave before the three Magi. Had he brought a gift? Theodore had not alluded to any. He came, after all, from a poor, barbarian land, the country of my exile, the land that will not accept tyrants but that draws to itself the Romans and Greeks who thirst after liberty. This land is, I would say, in the centre of the world. The Romans have for long been moving toward its frontiers and making ready to conquer it. The barbarians on the other hand have been attacking it for centuries. Sometimes they succeed in settling in it, but are unable to resist the humane quality of the climate. The strongest among them become merged in it, like a great stream swallowed up by the sands; the weaker ones desert it for other and less peaceful, I mean less religious, lands. I think that the mystery this land conceals in its people and in the harmony of its landscapes can only be explained by religion, a religion which, like a sculptor's hand, has moulded everything, from the scenery to the character of the people. Zamolxis was only a passing symbol, a forerunner of the God whose kingdom shall be world-wide and whose struggle with men will continue for thousands of years. Who will be able so quickly to sacrifice his habits and prejudices, his sanguinary and convenient gods who share with us our dearest vices, to accept the pain of a new birth as terrible as the idea of death itself? Now the sectaries of Zamolxis are the only people in the world who have no fear of death. They are therefore pre-

pared for the new birth and will perhaps be the first people to allow themselves to be moulded by the Messiah's law and to accept His teaching, without the need of any fundamental change. Others too will accept the law, but the change will be difficult and will need centuries to be effected. These peoples will change quickly enough to outward seeming, but at the bottom of their hearts they will long preserve the memory of the old law.

But then why was He not born here? The answer is simple. It was so that He might fulfil His destiny. The prophets speak of suffering and humiliation. Here no one would have caused Him to suffer. The whole people, from the kings to the shepherds, would have followed Him immediately. No one would have thought of spitting in His face, or of piercing His hands and feet, and if He had said 'I thirst,' He would not have been offered vinegar but milk and honey, and, remaining alive, He would not have risen again. In order to suffer and remain faithful to His mission, He has been born elsewhere, in a place where He will be rejected.

I do not say that, as soon as they are informed of His coming, the Dacians will march forth, because that would mean another war, waged this time in His name, and it is clear that His teaching will be a denial of war and that the wars men will make in His name will be merely pretexts to conceal their old thirst for domination and blood. The Dacians will continue their present way of life for long centuries to come. Civilized men and barbarians will pass through these lands and all the victors will be vanquished, because the old and gentle charm of the place will spring up in their hearts, and when this land touches the bedrock of humiliation, since all the warriors of the earth will have trampled it underfoot, then it will have accomplished its mission and all peoples will have their share in the message. The territory occupied by the Getae is vast. It knows the hope for death and for the life to come, and the strength of the one God. *The past and future of the Dacians are one.* How, after knowing them so well, can anyone fail to see this?

I have just remembered the priest's words: 'You will learn

still other things before you die.' Have I not already learned them? I am one of these victors who have been vanquished. Augustus exiled me here to make me suffer, and I have suffered. But I now know that Rome—that Rome which when my suffering began was the goal of all my thoughts—is not at the crossroads of all earthly highways, but at the end of another road. And I know that God too was born in exile.

* * *

I have been thinking of Rome a good deal, these last few days. The weather is fine and warm, and age loves the warmth. I even directed the athletic games at Tomis, acting as president, like Augustus at Neapolis a little before his death. In all the lands whither destiny has scattered them the Greeks have preserved the healthy traditions of their race. If in the past they have committed errors, if in the present they are no more than a pale reflection of what once they were, it must be recognized that they have never fallen as low as we have. They have often imitated us in evil, but they have never adopted our cruelties, and the games of the amphitheatre have never taken root among them. Their gods are as cruel as ours, but they have never treated blood and death as an entertainment for the multitude. I saw the Greeks, when I was a young man, in their arenas, hurling the discus and the javelin, measuring their strength and skill one against another, and nothing has changed since those days. While I was presiding over the games at Tomis, a centre of homage and admiration, I recovered my old enthusiasm, my youthful confidence and hope in life and in the meaning of human beauty. I set the victor's crown on the heads of young men, and in those eyes which came toward me, purified by a stainless victory, I saw the joy of life once again, and then I imagined Rome as she might have been if she had never known the shame of the *munera*, of man's blood shed before the eyes of Caesar, and the howling of the multitude calling for the death of the fallen gladiator; I dreamed of an ideal Rome fashioned in the image of Æneas and not of the gods. Everything has a meaning in

the life of man and in the life of peoples, every evil has its justification, and its punishment constitutes what we call history; but one cannot refrain from thinking of the other meaning, an impossible or forbidden one, which would give us perfect destinies and make Rome eternal. Rome without the games of the amphitheatre and without the Emperors would have conquered the world in a quite different way, and the sorrows of exile would have been unknown.

I have been recalling the prophecies that have been made throughout our history respecting the eternity of Rome, and I have tried to discover from outer signs what the soul of the city has never been able to express. Already in the time of Augustus people had begun to doubt of the original promises. Above the city which Romulus had just founded, twelve vultures had appeared, flying in twelve quiet and majestic circles. Now as each circle was a presage of a hundred years of life for the city, this made altogether twelve hundred years of future history. When Octavian received his title of Augustus, more than seven centuries had gone by, which meant that Rome was not eternal and that she would one day perish like all living things. A great effort was then made to correct the prophecy. The idea was due to Munatius Plancus. It was he who, at a banquet, had suggested to Cleopatra the notion of swallowing, in a cup of wine, a pearl of fabulous price that had been dissolved in vinegar. In this fashion she won the wager she had made with Antony as to how to spend the largest possible sum of money over a single meal. Mark Antony confessed himself beaten. Munatius Plancus, a man not devoid of imagination, was one of those secondary characters on the stage of history who are content with inspiring the great ones of the earth to make those grand gestures which sculptors will perpetuate in marble and poets in verse. He suggested to the Senate the idea of conferring on the victor of Actium, not the name of Romulus, as had been intended, but an entirely new *cognomen*, that of Augustus.¹ Octavian was therefore the new founder, and Rome voted herself a new

¹ Augustus means founder of a new sacred place. Applied to Rome, it meant that the city had just been founded anew.

lease of life. After the Emperor's death people began to whisper that twelve vultures had flown over the city on the day of his burial: which confirmed the tradition invented by Plancus, according to which Octavian, now Augustus, had been transformed into a second Romulus. And a much more important one than the first. I said so myself in the *Fasti*:

You merely won some little plot of ground,
But Caesar holds all countries under heaven.

Thus, in my verses, Rome became universal as well as eternal.

*Gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo:
Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem.*¹

With what joy and pride did they repeat, in Rome, these verses which also founded the Empire! *Urbis et orbis* was my present to Rome. Rome, after her second foundation, had become the world. Horace, Tibullus and Propertius had written in the same sense and can also be regarded as founders, while Virgil was foretelling the return of the golden age: 'Redeunt Saturnia regna.' How much did men do to give Augustus and his subjects the illusion of eternity! And I more than all the others.

Augustus and his poets are dead. The golden age has not endured for long. And if the limits of the Empire extend in space in the way I indicated, *urbis et orbis*, its limit in time is becoming shorter and shorter. A word will be enough to bring falling from the sky, one after the other, the twelve vultures of the two legends, who are as little eternal as the centuries.

My conscience troubles me. What is driving me, in this journal, to disparage my country, the country whose glory I sang when I was young? The Dacian priest conferred on my soul a partial and temporary peace. I realize this after hearing Theodore's narrative, because, convinced as I am that the old

¹ 'For other nations frontiers are fixed:
For Rome, the city and the world are one'
(*Fasti*, II, 683).

gods are false, and false all that concerns them—the notions of an earthly fatherland, of morals and private life and future life—I do not know how to conduct myself so as to be in harmony with the new God. The religion of Zamolxis is confessedly a simple stage, a kind of expectation, although conscious and active as compared with the fixed expectations of other religions, but as unquiet as is my soul today.

* * *

I wanted, last night, to record the unexpected scene I had gone through, but my hand was trembling and my heart beating too violently.

He came late, when I was alone in the house and reading letters that had arrived from Rome. He has become much thinner of late, but his eyes have grown bigger and his features have sagged like those of a tragic mask that expresses the fear, despair and impotence of a being faced with a hostile destiny. His eyes appear to stare beyond the visible world, as though obsessed by some image that is everywhere present and that seems to be guiding them in life. He pretended not to have understood me when I motioned him to a chair; he said, without preamble :

‘You are the only being aware of my crime. This knowledge is what is called a cause, and my misfortune is the effect of it. By suppressing the cause, the effect will disappear. I’m extremely sorry, but I’m obliged to kill you.’

He talked like a Greek. Anyone else would have killed me without preamble or self-justification.

‘You know I shall not speak,’ was my reply. ‘I promised you.’

‘That’s not enough. Your presence is harmful to me. I’m afraid of you and your reproaches, and the fact that you are capable of denouncing me so as to be at peace with your conscience. Your promise is only a word. I no longer believe in words.’

‘If it’s a question of your happiness or tranquillity,’ I said, ‘kill me. I am old, and your friend. You have every right. I

have often consoled you. Why shouldn't I do so again, once and for all?'

He continued to stare into vacancy, but my calm had evidently troubled him, because he made no move.

'What are you waiting for?' I asked.

A wave of distress passed over his eyes. He wiped the sweat that covered his brow and uttered these words which troubled me deeply, because they came from a tormented soul, uncertain of itself but destined to misfortune:

'I don't know how to set about it. I'm not a murderer, you understand? I'm not a murderer. What I should like to kill in you is not the man you are, and whom I love as a brother, but the gods who are hurting me. I want to kill all the people I love, because you have all been the instruments of my destiny. Destiny has used you to torture me, to drive me into becoming what I have become, to force me to say to you what I have just said. By suppressing you and Lydia I shall become free again, at any rate for a moment.'

'Free? But does your decision to kill me belong to you? If you believe in all-powerful destiny, you should push your reasoning to its logical consequences. By killing me and Lydia, you will be still more of a slave, since none of your acts will have been dictated by your conscience. It is not I, but you, who are the instrument of your destiny. You will have only remorse and no moment of freedom. Destiny allows no respite.'

He looked at me anxiously.

'The gods are evil, aren't they?'

'They are neither good nor evil. They do not exist.'

Herimon smiled.

'That doesn't console me. You like to play with words, but from now on that game does not amuse me. Tell me something else, anything, but don't try to play with me. I should prefer to hear a truth, even if it were to make me tremble with fear and rage.'

'Listen then to what I am going to tell you. The true God was born, some years ago, in a village of Judaea. He has come among us to speak of the death of gods and men.'

'Of men? Ha, ha, ha! Are men as mortal as the gods? What is this stupid story you have told me?'

'There will be no more men, in the sense of beings who are instruments of destiny, as captive and ferocious as animals. Henceforth there will be only souls, each of which will decide its own destiny. And God will judge each soul separately and will perhaps pardon those who have done evil without wishing to and who have afterwards regretted it. You too will perhaps be pardoned. Do not imagine that you are an instrument of destiny. Evil comes from the depths of your own being.'

'No. That would be too horrible. I prefer my gods and their chains and this resemblance to animals. Your God is too complex and embarrassing. No one will wish to accept Him, because He complicates things terribly. He makes us responsible. I don't want responsibility. I prefer to be the plaything of my gods, because liberty makes me guilty.'

He tried to laugh, without succeeding. No relief showed on his features. I then realized what a difficult task will fall on the Saviour because, unless I am mistaken, men are all of Herimon's stamp. The old faith is very commodious. The new faith will frighten them because it will turn each of them into a Prometheus, free as regards his acts and directly responsible before God. We shall need thousands of years to get used to this freedom. And much blood will flow, beginning with mine. I was waiting for Herimon's move, for the death-blow he had promised. A great quietude had come over me and I liked this kind of fear, as if I were going to fall into a gentle sleep beside a wild beast who had become inoffensive. He looked at me with eyes that were not those of my friend. I am sure he did not see me. He came nearer. I did not move. The sentinel on the ramparts called out the hour.

'I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you,' Herimon repeated. He drew a dagger which had been concealed in his toga, looked at it as if it had nothing to do with what he had just said, then slowly turned his back, moved to the door and went out into the night. It was then that I understood the meaning of this dialogue, or rather monologue. Herimon had

not seen me during the whole evening, and it was not to me that he had spoken and replied. He had simply been speaking and replying to himself. And it was not I whom he had come to kill.

Days passed by. I went to look for him twice, but the tavern and the house were shut and silent, as if they had been abandoned for a very long time. This afternoon Lydia came to see me. Herimon had disappeared some days before. I went out with her, but our search was in vain: no one had seen him. Finally, towards evening, on our way back we met Honorius who was returning from the harbour. Some fishermen had found our poor friend's body, all swollen after drowning. People were saying that he had fallen from the jetty, near the lighthouse, and that the accident was due to drunkenness: a logical conclusion, in accord with the life of a simple tavern-keeper. I knew, and so did Lydia, that a different kind of drunkenness had been the cause of Herimon's death, and that he had not been a simple tavern-keeper. He had died without hope—that was all—victim of an illusion that refused to materialize. He had believed in love, but he had had to choose death in order to forget everything, which was what he had so ardently desired these last few years. Is not this end symbolical? It seems to speak in the name of all these men with hearts of flesh, whose desires go beyond any possibility of assuagement. They are tortured by nameless and shapeless appetites. They are desperately seeking the unknown and miraculous anodyne, and not finding it they fly to death, the ancient consoler. What wretchedness! And yet the air quivers with expectation.

* * *

The civic authorities have broken in the door of Herimon's establishment. I was present on this occasion. The tavern-keeper's will was lying conspicuously on a table. He bequeathed all his property to Lydia, except for ten amphorae of Chian wine which, he stated, were to console my exile at Tomis. In this way he implored my silence and perhaps my pardon.

The tavern has been open again since this morning. Lydia has replaced Herimon behind the bar, her face has become severe and commanding and her eyes have lost that look of sham innocence that sprang from her irresponsible way of taking part in life. She knows how to play the new game, just as if Herimon had initiated her into the secrets of the trade. It is possible she has inherited his character even more than his tavern and his money. How simple and clear is women's destiny! They dwell outside and beyond the tormented destiny of men, like gods who make us live or die according to the whim of the moment. I am thinking of Fabia. From far away she tries to imagine what my exile is like, but she has long since grown used to her respectable status as the wife of a condemned man; and this tragedy she has experienced through reading my letters. For years I thought that everything depended on her, on her skill and her connexions, accustomed as I am to see life in terms of the good will or ill will of a woman. But age causes me more and more to forget the principles of the *Ars amatoria*; and it teaches me the use of certain liberties. I am also thinking of Livia, who has survived Augustus and who was the real mistress of the Empire, and its real foundress. Augustus had a sceptre, but it was Augusta who wielded it and still wields it.

* * *

I received today an unexpected letter from Artemis, the courtesan who loved the gods.

"These lines will certainly surprise you, my old and dear friend. They come from a woman who thought herself happy, surrounded with love and tranquillity, wealth and public esteem, and who is no more blessed with these things now than she was at Tomis. Do you think that possible or even reasonable? In the course of a long and loveless existence, you are the only man I have understood and the only one I have loved. How can I explain it? I am not accustomed to writing and I don't wish to offend you. I often think of you. You are also the only man who has never wounded me by word or gesture. I liked to listen to you, and—do you

remember?—while I was chafing your cold feet during your first winter at Tomis, I used to press my ear to your breast and like to think that what you were saying came from your heart, like the sounds of a bell that I alone had the gift of understanding. You also knew how to listen to me and the silly things I said never bored you; or, in any case, you feigned an interest in my talk and I was grateful to you, because I needed a human soul who would listen to me and no one had ever been ready to do so, or else people laughed at me and my wild imaginings. Someone once called me a Sappho in reverse, meaning a Sappho capable of making love with men but incapable of writing poems. Did you ever realize the love I had for you, and of which I was ashamed of speaking? You were an exile among men as I among women. I used to dream of the gods and their lives, but it was something else that I awaited. You too dreamed of the gods, you had devoted to them your life and talent, but exile had endowed you with a new light, and in the midst of suffering and solitude you had made the discovery of yourself. When I remained alone, after you had left me or I had left you, I continued to hear you. Your voice used to speak to me in dreams, and I would awaken in the night still full of your presence. I gave you in exchange all that I could, so that your solitude might be more bearable, your exile less sad and your bed less cold. I gave you very little, I know, because you filled my life while I only occupied a poor little place in an existence full of emperors, gods, women and poetry. I felt all the same that, beyond outward appearances, some intimate bonds had grown up between us, and that the feelings I had for you were not futile. You loved me, without realizing it but with a love that sought in me the image of an impossible perfection. In the same way I saw in you the image of a god, by which I mean the image of the same perfection that you were seeking in me. We resembled each other, and that was the source of our love and understanding. Have I a right to speak these words? In Tomis I should have lacked the courage. But I know that the world will change, that it is now changing, that everything people regarded as true will be a lie and that many lies that frighten people today will be con-

solations in the future. For God, the true and only God of whom the Getae used to speak, has been born among us. Have you heard of this? The priests are trembling, and the sorcerers hide themselves. No one dares manifest his joy, because people are awaiting miracles, and He has not yet shown Himself to the world. It is said that He would be found in Judaea. The only people who rejoice at the moment are those who suffer or who dream. The others are unaware of Him, they will always be unaware, even after His coming. I send you this news because I know it will give you pleasure. I don't know what more to say of the matter. It is stated that He will be called the Messiah or the Saviour, and that He will judge men, and that His Empire will have no end. Those who speak of it—and they are very few, because the others are not interested in these things but are simply occupied with their money and their ambitions—say that, according to the ancient books of the Hebrews, God will allow Himself to be killed by men and that He will suffer like a malefactor. Do you think that possible? There are certain things that I cannot yet understand. Shall we always be the strongest, with our faults, our cruelties, our pleasures and our hatred for everything that transcends us? So then I ask: *For whom has He come?*

'I shall expect a long letter from you.'

So a few people everywhere know about it, and Artemis is one of those who are rejoicing at His coming.

There are no news from Theodore.

* * *

Artemis is right: I am like her. I loved that Sappho in reverse. She taught me to accept things I detested. She was my first root in a soil that seemed to me hostile and unacceptable. I have written her a long letter passing on to her what Theodore had related to me.

Time passes so quickly that I can no longer grasp the meaning and aspect of the seasons. All that takes place beyond my immediate ken—in nature, among people and in the city—is like a distant shadow, having no connexion with my own life.

SEVENTH YEAR



I shall die among the Getae—this I know. A few years ago the idea filled me with horror. I used to imagine my bodiless spirit wandering in these regions, in company with Medea's; but I know now that our souls have a different destiny and do not follow the wanderings of our earthly bodies. How vague and uncertain all this is! Theodore has ceased writing. He is very probably dead, dead before reaching his goal, killed by drink in some tavern of an eastern seaport, in Alexandria or somewhere. He was the happiest man and the most disillusioned, of all time. Is it possible to think that God did not wish him beside Him. And if not, why did He lead him to the crib where He was born? What was the meaning of this tragedy? The reign of God is not yet with us. That is all that can be said.



What had to happen has at last happened. This separation has been as sad as my departure from Rome, seven years ago. What is the good of concealing the fact? I can have no consolation: no thoughts or memories can assuage my pain or dry my tears. I thought that the Dacian priest had found the way to free me from all pettiness and that Theodore's revelations, which completed what I had learned during my journey into Dacia and which confirmed all my hopes, had severed for me all bonds of sentiment and liberated me from my weaknesses for ever. I felt once again well balanced and was convinced that my peace of mind depended henceforth only on my own free-will, and that I was therefore absolute master of

my happiness. But this happiness came from outside me, as I have just discovered from the departure of Dokia.

An explanation is needed.

Honorius is Dokia's husband and little Dokia is their legitimate daughter. They had been married by a Dacian priest, according to the rites of Zamolxis. Here then is another case of 'treason'. Honorius became a Dacian at the time when, by marrying a Getic woman contrary to military regulations, he abjured the Roman faith. I now have the key to a secret which I had never managed to discover. Honorius let his beard grow and at the same time avoided seeing me. He sympathized with me but refrained from visiting my house, which might have involved him in revealing more than was wise. I was writing too many letters to Rome and I might, in sending news of Tomis to my influential friends, out of pure negligence have given him away. Meanwhile he protected me from a distance and offered no opposition to my travelling. Having placed Dokia in my service so as better to supervise my movements and discover my innermost thoughts, he had quickly taken account of my attitude to Augustus and the Empire; but he never abused his knowledge by informing Rome, because he immediately saw in me an ally and almost a coreligionist. He wished, all the same, to remain loyal to his mission and his uniform and he never revealed to me the great secret of his life. He did so only when, having been recalled to Rome, he decided to join his wife's family, that is Sedida and her household, beyond the Danube. His successor will come to Tomis with a century of legionaries and naval technicians who are to establish in these waters one of the supply-bases for our fleet.

Honorius and Dokia therefore avoided travelling by sea. They placed the child and old Dyzaccus and their goods in a two-horse wagon and travelled through lower Scythia to the Danube which they intend to cross near Carsium, where Comozeus is awaiting them.

They left yesterday, during the night. I had known of their plan for two days past, but I did nothing to prevent their going. Dokia has to follow her husband whose life henceforth

is in danger wherever there are any Romans. We all wept as we took leave, and even Honorius gave vent to his feelings for me. I saw him for the first time holding his daughter in his arms, as if they had just met after a long separation. It was I who had kept them apart, for years. Dokia had laid aside her reserve and now suddenly appeared in her role as wife, a role she had so long hidden from me. She seemed like a Roman matron, while Honorius, freed from restraint, presented the appearance of a genuine Dacian. They have transmitted to each other what was best in themselves, as well as their noblest movements. Little Dokia is like them but she is also something else, a new being, the perfect image of another race which will be moulded of what is best in the Dacians and the Romans: a race of the future, dear to God.

Honorius had laid aside his uniform and on the night of departure put on Dacian dress. We took our last meal together in Dokia's house; and it was from there that they set out so as not to have to pass through the city the gates of which are shut at night, and also to avoid being seen. I embraced them. I knew it was the last time we should see each other in this world.

I spent the night alone in Dokia's house. It was cold and empty, yet I still seemed to feel their presence and hear the echo of their voices. About midnight I was so tortured by the phantoms of those I had just held in my arms that I went out and paced along the beach in the moonlight. Wavelets were breaking on the sand with a faint murmur: the sea was at rest. How many notable events in my life have taken place on this beach! It was here one day that Dokia watched over me while I slept, and let me guess her sympathy for me. It was from here that I saw the galley set out, the galley that was to have taken me to Parthia, when I wanted to escape from Augustus. It was here that my own 'Augustus' was killed by the eagle and that little Dokia had displayed her strength and courage. And it was on this beach that Theodore had related his strange adventure and given me the good news. I was not thinking of Medea. The place had lost that wild and inhospitable atmosphere that had once clung to it. The years had

tamed the landscape, it was now part of my life, and reality had separated it from all the dismal spectres of the myth.

Shooting stars were falling seaward, for we are now in August, the month when the heavens speak to the earth in signs men cannot decipher. This vast sky is now more familiar to me than the Italian sky. The Great Bear, high above Dokia's house, is no longer the symbol of my exile but rather the symbol of my new fatherland, my last temporary home.

On my return I stopped to look at the house, which was as white as a fragment of the moon. I suddenly realized that it was like Dokia and that the two windows which were gazing at me, wide-eyed and melancholy, were like the eyes of her who had gone away.

* * *

The centurion Valerius summoned me today to the place he has occupied since his arrival, in the governor's palace opposite the gymnasium. He rose to receive me, but his frigid eyes at once made me realize what his future attitude will be. I also detected in his glance that indifference to humanity which is the sign of men with a vocation for politics and which makes them our enemies. He took the trouble to enquire after my health and to ask whether it was in his power to make life more agreeable for me. But a wave of antipathy had come over us from the outset. He spoke my language, he came from Rome, the same blood flowed in our veins; but not for a moment did that first impression of mutual antagonism pass away, or fade from our eyes, despite the efforts we both made to conceal it.

'You were on good terms with my predecessor,' he remarked, after the customary politeness with which he had opened.

'You are well informed.'

'It would have been your duty to advise Rome of his intentions of leaving his post.'

'I was unaware that an exile had the duty of becoming an informer for the army.'

'Your silence might be interpreted as complicity. Besides,

the woman who has gone with him was in your service. You were in very regular relations with both of them. Didn't they ever reveal their intentions to you?'

'No. Apart from this I was unaware of the relations between them. Their flight together has surprised me as much as it has you.'

'What do you think about it?'

'I don't follow your meaning.'

'Do you approve of your friend's flight?'

'It is an affair that does not concern me. I personally am still here, as you can see. I cannot take the liberty to judge others, especially as they are my friends. If you have called me here to add my testimony to the case which you are preparing against Honorius, you have come to the wrong man, centurion. I am not prepared to tell you lies. What really do you want? Evidence against Honorius? But isn't his flight sufficient for you? It is a question of treason. Underline the word and take the measures that military law prescribes in such cases.'

He gazed at me in surprise. Seven years had passed since my leaving Rome, and in the interval the soldiers had turned into policemen. This centurion whom the Emperor had sent to Tomis could not understand my attitude. He had been counting on my testimony in order to make his report on Honorius a masterpiece flavoured with literature. My resistance hurt him, and he began to lose his temper.

'A man who wishes to recover his liberty should make a full statement. Your collaboration in this matter might be of service to you.'

'What do you wish to know?'

'The place where Honorius is at the present time.'

'I can only repeat what I said before. Honorius did not make me the confidant of his movements. But I can, if you wish, collaborate with you in the sense you have just indicated. Honorius is probably very far away. He has certainly crossed the Danube and even the mountains. It is logical to suppose that he has put the greatest possible distance between you and him.'

'So you are obstinate in preserving the secret.'

'I have just proved the contrary. I have no other secrets to tell you.'

'It is in my power to put you under house-arrest.'

'In that way you would spare me the fatigue of walking here again. I am old and tired. You are very much younger. If you wish to see me again, be good enough to pay me a visit. What are the news from Rome?'

'Bad, very bad news for you. Your question saves me from offering any vain condolences. The reason for which you were exiled has not altered. You have done us a great deal of harm and are still regarded as the corrupter of Roman youth.'

'So people continue to read me? I was unaware of that.'

'There is no reason to be proud of it. The Empire needs soldiers, not poets.'

'You would have been more severe than Augustus in judging me?'

'There's no doubt of that. And I still can be.' He paused and, avoiding my eyes, looked through the window. 'That is, of course,' he added, 'in the measure in which you maintain your former stand.'

'I can't become a soldier at my age,' I observed as I got up. 'Am I to consider myself under house-arrest from now on?'

'You will soon receive my instructions. You may not leave Tomis without a special permit.'

He too got up.

'Everything depends on you, don't forget that.'

'I have nothing to add, centurion. If you like poetry, I should be glad to see you at my house. One could pass some pleasant evenings reading verses.'

'I only read the prose of my superior officers.'

I hate the man. This is the beginning of a new exile.

* * *

All my old friends except Lydia have left Tomis. This time it is the end. I am alone in the midst of a new world of strangers, from the old charwoman who has taken Dokia's place and

who never utters a word except to say 'What were you saying?' to Valerius and his legionaries who are active in the streets and about the harbour. So I am back at the point where I was seven years ago, on my first arrival, save that in the interval my strength has left me and I have no desire to begin over again. I am not even working any more. I write no letters now, because all correspondence must pass through Valerius's hands and he would take pleasure in returning my letters or in drawing his superiors' attention to their subversive and immoral content. He might say to me: 'Empires are built by warriors and not by traitors and fugitives like Honorius.' He would be quite right. I should answer: 'That is true, but I don't like empires.' I find myself engaged in imaginary dialogues with him. I grow angry and think of something else; but his image rises once again before my eyes and the wordy combat is resumed. I overwhelm him with arguments and insults, but he still remains in my imagination. He has become the enemy and I dream of him. Sometimes I call my faithful dog 'Augustus' to my aid.

At bottom, what Valerius said has been a great consolation. People in Rome still read me and I have remained the major cause of decadence, corruption and lost battles. The Empire is as uneasy now as when Augustus thought he saw in my books the canker that was gnawing at his work. To understand that work, Jupiter needed something human by which to measure it. Now he is dead. And I am still here. What a satisfaction!

* * *

I went down to the sea this evening. Twilight was fading, like a red torch that some giant hand was slowly dipping into the waters. The beach was deserted. There were still a few figs hidden among the branches and I plucked them as I passed; but I felt no temptation to lie on the cold, wet sand. As I approached the sea the wind drove the spray against my face. My sandals were drenched by the incoming waves and, when I drew back, sank into the sand. I cried to the wind:

'Corinna! Corinna!' Desire and nostalgia flooded me with a sense of happiness and tears rolled down my cheeks. I thought I was back on Planasia. Autumn had driven away the Romans: I was the last stranger on the island and I liked to prolong the pleasure of returning. I used to write a great deal in those days. Distance had not yet turned into grief.

This evening, as I stood on the breakwater of Tomis, I lived over again those scenes of my youth. Angry waves were breaking at my feet. The same briny spindrift lashed my face, but the tears did not spring to my eyes. I have no tears now. They are dried up and vanish, along with joy, buried within us by old age. I wanted to cry out a name, to cast it to the wind, but I knew that all appeals were now vain and that no voice would answer from beyond the sea. The same autumn touched the sky with red, ripened the fruit and brought with it cold and tempest. Nothing had changed in the world except this human form that had lived I know not how. The only hope lay hidden beyond the limits of solitude, in the kingdom of the immutable. And I summoned death for release.

Returning home I stopped outside Lydia's place. It was already dark. Before entering the tavern, which was lit up, I cast a glance through the open door. Sitting at a table she looked very handsome and was showily attired, her fingers glittering with artificial gems, blue, green and red, her shoulders bare and her hair tied with ribbons of many-coloured silk. Valerius was seated opposite her. They were absorbed in intimate converse, gazing into each other's eyes. She was laughing. The centurion seized her hands, above the table, but she feigned not to notice it.

I went on my way.

* * *

She came to see me next day. I must admit that I was expecting this visit. She asked for news of Dokia, but unfortunately I had had none.

'Are you now quite out of touch with her?'

'Yes.'

'And yet you were good friends; more than good friends. I had been suspecting you for a long time. She often spent the night at your house and I was jealous. She prevented me from being with you more often.'

'Herimon would not have allowed you. You have soon forgotten poor Herimon. Yet he treated you well. Do you think of marrying again before long?'

'Oh no, I'm better as I am.'

'There is no lack of opportunity.'

'I have all I want. What is the good of a husband?'

'You will be bored after seeing all this happiness around you and I am sure that you will soon be seeking new sensations in any quarter.'

'For example?'

'Let us suppose that politics are not unattractive.'

'The Livia of Tomis?'

'The comparison is apt. You would make a good auxiliary for an Augustus in search of an empire; and you could begin with Tomis. Have I guessed rightly?'

She can still blush, but it was without pleasure now. A malicious light showed in her eyes; and at that moment I knew that she had ceased to belong to me, that she had given her soul to another.

'Politics,' I continued, 'are a difficult art. They have the power to make women ugly by obliging them to commit evil deeds, to betray old friends, to serve pitiless masters. All this leaves traces in the features.'

She has become the first weapon that Valerius has decided to use against me. Happily I was forewarned, or her task would have been only too easy. She did her best to converse in the tone of former days, but she had understood my allusion and the charm was broken for ever. Her departure left a great void in the house.



Here is the question I asked myself the other day: Did I never, at the time when I was writing my principal book, have a

presentiment of the days I am now passing through? I mean my days, and humanity's. Did I ever have a revelation? God speaks to prophets, but poets are also prophets, they are the link between man and beauty, and if beauty is God, then poets ought to be the men who reveal the existence of the true God. And in the end I found these amazing verses in Book XV of the *Metamorphoses*. Pythagoras is speaking:

Now, since the god inspires me,
I follow where he leads, to open Delphi,
The very heavens, bring you revelation
Of mysteries, great matters never traced
By any mind before, and matters lost
Or hidden and forgotten, these I sing.
There is no greater wonder than to range
The starry heights, to leave the earth's dull regions,
To ride the clouds, to stand on Atlas's shoulders,
And see, far off, far down, the little figures
Wandering here and there, devoid of reason,
Anxious, in fear of death, and so advise them,
And so make fate an open book.

O mortals,
Dumb in cold fear of death, why do you tremble
At Stygian rivers, shadows, empty names.
The lying stock of poets, and the terrors
Of a false world? I tell you that your bodies
Can never suffer evil, whether fire
Consumes them, or the waste of time. Our souls
Are deathless; always, when they leave our bodies,
They find new dwelling-places.¹

The soul then is rescued from death. I knew this, but how? Who had told me? because in these verses Pythagoras is myself. It must have been some self hidden behind my everyday existence and who appeared from time to time to write about 'the god who inspires me' and about immortality. The whole of my work was a reflection of ancient times, of the old age of the world, from the *Medea* to the *Metamorphoses*,

¹ *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, translated by Rolfe Humphries, pp. 369-70.

from the *Ars amatoria* to the *Fasti*. I sang of the body, of pleasure, and terror and the gods—all those petty realities that today are crumbling under the weight of the one God, whom the Dacians and the Hebrews had known and worshipped. My notion of immortality was as follows:

..... the great renewer,
Nature, makes form from form, and oh, believe me,
That nothing ever dies. What we call birth
Is the beginning of a difference,
No more than that, and death is only ceasing
Of what had been before. The parts may vary,
Shifting from here to there, hither and yon,
And back again, but the great sum is constant.¹

Metamorphosis was therefore the secret by which, following Pythagoras, I explained the eternity of the soul. I could not conceive of a pure, unchangeable immortality, outside of and beyond the life of the body. I am not therefore ranging 'the starry heights', but moving near to earth, among the opinions of contemporaries and predecessors. I was prophesying backwards.

This conclusion disappointed me. I decided to pursue my inquiries further and my obstinacy was at last rewarded because in Book XIV I found the story of the Phoenix, the bird who every five hundred years rises from his own ashes. So it is not a question of a real metamorphosis or metempsychosis, because the bird always remains himself without ever dying or becoming anything but himself, to all eternity. Is not this the symbol of the human soul and at the same time of the new man who is preparing to be born again out of the ashes of our age? He awaits only the word of God in order to take wing. If only Herimon were here, or Honorius, or Dokia and I could speak to them of these things! But they have all gone; each has fulfilled himself, in life or death. Artemis has fulfilled her destiny. I now understand the tragic meaning of exile, a state suspended between our lost beginning and an end which remains inscrutable. I should like to be in Rome,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

or to die, but neither is permitted me. And so I live between two nostalgias, of which the only one susceptible of cure is the second, a death that is nearer for me than a return to Rome, though its date I cannot fix. I stagger, drunk with uncertainties and with prayer, hesitant between Tiberius and God.

* * *

On leaving the house this morning I twisted an ankle. A compassionate stranger helped me back to bed. I had turned white with pain and was sweating like a horse. Gradually the pain left me as my ankle swelled and my body took refuge in a deep restorative sleep which, however, brought back the usual nightmares. This time I was in Rome or perhaps some other city; I was seated on a chair under a portico. A public square lay behind me, and in front was a street where people were passing oblivious of me, busied with their own cares. But an unknown woman took up in her hands some of the dirty water flowing down the gutter and sprinkled my ankle with it. This water was the only remedy they could offer me in a city which I knew but in which I was unknown. I felt ashamed of being there, with my leg exposed for everyone to see, and I begged the good woman to go and call my mother whose name I shouted, more and more loudly.

'Your mother has never lived in our city,' she replied. 'No doubt you are mistaken.'

I then begged her to bring Corinna, my love. Who in the whole world did not know Corinna? She would have saved me: I should have got better in her arms at once. I imagined her arrival, her exclamation of tenderness and fear, her embrace after so long a separation. I knew that she no longer had an apartment and that to find a room where our love would be sheltered from prying eyes would have been quite a problem. Corinna was as young as in the old days; I could see her crossing a street and speaking with people I knew; but the woman who was continuing to pour over my swollen ankle the dirty water which then ran into a drain near my chair—this woman told me that Corinna was not here, but that she

lived in Rome, a city far away, and that I could not go there because of my swollen leg or because of a much more serious malady. I next called for my brother, then for Dokia and Honorius and Scorys, but in vain; they all lived very far away; and no one in this city knew anything about me. I was quite alone under the portico, paralysed by the sprain and in the hands of an ignorant woman who was pouring filthy water over my ankle. Friendship and love were alike forbidden me, and all the people I had loved in the course of a long and happy past were very far away beyond the seas. They had forgotten me, and I could clearly see them busied with their own affairs, and having their eyes fixed on other objects, as though I had ceased to exist.

I awoke under the onset of a pain which did not come from my ankle but from a heart ulcerated by this forgetfulness. Then I fell asleep again. This time I was in Rome, without a doubt: I was simply ignorant of how I got there. The streets, the squares, the houses, all were familiar, but the faces of the people I met were new faces and these men and women wore strange dresses. The fashions have changed, I said to myself, and all this time a terrible fear was coming over me. I was in Rome, but Caesar had given me no permit to come; he had not yet even pardoned me. The Imperial police had already been informed of my flight from Tomis and anyone who passed me in the street might stop me and have me cast into prison or thrown to the wild beasts, under the dazzling lights of the amphitheatre. Why had I left the quiet and happy scene of my exile? What was I doing here, in my own city which, however, did not want me? Friends were passing close by and making as if they did not recognize me, because they feared Tiberius's police and his possible reprisals. The years that had passed by had changed nothing in my lot, they had not even softened the reign of terror under which the Empire, victim of its own greatness, was now condemned to live. I had to find some solution, to go and meet Corinna; but her house was not to be found. I got lost among streets which I did not remember, and finally decided to go home. I was hungry. Fabia would have given me something to eat, she would have hidden

and protected me. But my house no longer existed and no one remembered it. People were beginning to look at me with the eyes of policemen; my arrest was imminent. How had I been able to leave Tomis and come here, when the régime had not changed and no one had thought of granting me a pardon? I could see Tomis now as the only safe place in the world, the place where I was free and happy. Why had I left it? Someone had begun to point at me and shout: 'There's Ovid, the exile! Arrest him!' I fled, but my ankle hurt me and then I fell with my hands in the gutter, and the filthy water splashed my face and blinded me. I was lost.

I awoke gasping, exhausted by the mad flight and the terror I had felt. I could scarcely breathe; my whole body was in pain. I called for Dokia, being still only half awake. No one answered. I was alone.

My foot only hurts now when I try to walk; while lying down there is no pain. So I remain in bed and give myself up to day-dreams. The events of my childhood stand out more and more clearly on the screen of memory, as if the years were accumulating over all the later periods of my life and leaving only the early years uncovered. Everything in the far distance is clear. I used to take the initiative in escaping from the house on summer afternoons when everyone rested in the coolness of the bedrooms, with the shutters closed. My parents forced us to go to bed or at least to spend two hours lying down, in the dog-days. We would pretend to be asleep and when all sounds had died away I would climb out of the window and call to my brother to follow me. We went bare-foot, so as not to be heard, and it made us grimace with pain to cross the paving-stones of the court which felt red-hot under the sun—that sun which in July and August the country-folk called the *lion*. It did in fact bite like a lion's jaws. We entered the orchard through a wooden gate, which we opened with infinite precautions because it squeaked horribly: then we were in the forbidden kingdom. The orchard was noisy with insects and heavy with aroma; one could almost see the fruit ripening and swelling in the sun like a loaf in a hot oven. The first temptation was the fig-tree at the

far end of the orchard. Climbing along the smooth branches and putting the lizards to flight, we always chose the weeping figs, that is, the ones whose surface had been pricked by the lizards so that the juice had flowed down to form a tear at the bottom of the fruit. The sweetness filled my mouth and my life was concentrated on this sensation of happiness and satisfaction which I was later to find in love. We soon left the fig-tree because its scanty foliage gave little shelter from the sun which beat upon our necks. We would then, with our hands laden with figs, make our way under the cool arcades of the vineyard. We plucked the ripe grape-clusters with a sharp movement of the hand, at the point where the stem swells into a sort of fragile knot. Then we sat in the grass to savour the grapes at ease. Two grapes and one fig was the rule. Then two figs and four grapes, and so on: a feast in geometrical progression. Finally we could manage no more. Our stomachs seemed not to belong to us. The cicadas, intoxicated by the glare and heat, made the air vibrate with their song. We talked about women, politics and poetry, I dazzled my brother with my knowledge. He on his part made me laugh until the tears came as he mimicked the grown-ups—our father's voice, the limping gait of the Greek housekeeper, or the way our uncle coughed. I found rhymes for everything and invented stories.

These two hours appeared endless, so slowly does the time pass when one is young. After jumping over the fence at the end of the orchard we found ourselves in a little-frequented square, deserted at this hour, where the grass grew among the paving stones. In the middle rose the columns of the temple of Diana, white and dazzling under the glare. Cradled and lulled by the song of the cicadas, Sulmo slept in a heavy silence. The very shadow of the needle of the sundial had ceased to move, and we were the only living things in the town which now belonged to us. It was our hour. We made our way towards the stream that flowed along the edge of the town and where the usual spectacle awaited us. In hot weather the women from the working-class quarter would often risk bathing at this spot. Lying in the grass and concealed by a line of

poplars, we would watch them. They laughed and cried out as they splashed water at each other, white and invulnerable as goddesses.

We returned home excited and with beating hearts, like timid and discouraged fauns. Childhood weighed on us as though it were a thing of shame, and the time that separated us from manhood seemed immense and unbearable.

* * *

Lucius Sisena has remained the whole afternoon with me. He is a centurion attached to the new maritime prefecture of the lower Danube and is on his way to his unit which is in garrison at Troesmis. He was anxious to see me, since he admires my poems and he knew I was still at Tomis. He will be one of those who, sooner or later, will take the road to freedom and will join other Romans in the Dacian forest. He did not say this, but I had no difficulty in reading it in his heart. A long scar marks his right cheek, and his gaze is that of a man disillusioned. He has been serving in the XXth legion and has just left Germany, where he distinguished himself in battles against the hosts of Arminius and in repressing the rebellions of the legions against Germanicus.¹ The first to rise were the VIIIth, the XVth and the IXth, which had been sent to Pannonia. This took place a little after Augustus's death. Tiberius sent his son Drusus, who however met with a bad reception; he was even ill-treated by the rebels and escaped only thanks to an eclipse of the moon. The mutineers thought that their behaviour had offended the gods—was not Tiberius the son of a god, of Augustus who had taken his place on Olympus?—and they submitted at once like frightened children. The principal ringleaders, Percenius and Vibulenus, were put to death in Drusus's tent, while outside the Praetorians massacred all who were suspected, rightly or wrongly, of having taken an active part in the rebellion.

¹ Germanicus Caesar was the son of Nero Claudius Drusus, and a nephew of Tiberius. An admired writer—in Greek—and a brave and competent general, he died in A.D. 19, at the age of thirty-four, possibly from poison administered on the instructions of Tiberius (Translator).

A few days later, without suspecting what was taking place in Pannonia, the legions of Germanicus, namely the Vth, XXth and XXIst, mutinied in their quarters in Germany, on the banks of the Rhine. Germanicus was at that time in Gaul, raising taxes. Warned of what was happening, he immediately joined the army on the Rhine, where every thing was in a state of chaos. Certainly a general could have been confronted with a more agreeable sight. The old legionaries forced him to thrust his fingers into their mouths, so that he could feel their toothless gums, while others undressed in his presence to display frightful scars and incurable sores. They had all done more than twenty years of service, and they complained of the centurions and of their living quarters. They wanted to return home, they were claiming double pay and were also asking for good land which they could farm. After a dramatic scene, in the course of which he even wished to put an end to his life (he was calling out: 'A sword, give me a sword!' until a centurion proposed that he should march on Rome, backed by the legions, and take the place of Tiberius), Germanicus agreed to their demands, and paid their wages out of his private funds. The legions then began to retire into winter quarters. But on the following night some rebels broke in the door of the house where Germanicus was living, in order to kill the envoys who had been sent to them by the Senate. They maintained that, according to rumours circulating in the camp, they knew that the Senate was against them and that the envoys had orders to cancel the advantages they had obtained from their general. In the midst of the uproar, which showed no signs of diminishing, Germanicus decided to send his wife Agrippina, a niece of Augustus, together with his son Caligula, who had been born in the camp, into the country of the Gauls, where they would be safe. Other women accompanied them; but on seeing Agrippina and little Caligula in the midst of this sad procession, the mutineers went down on their knees before them, begging them to remain, while others promised complete submission to Germanicus. A court was set up forthwith to judge the guilty and administer summary justice. The accused man stood up on a platform, surrounded

by soldiers holding naked swords. If he was recognized as responsible for the mutiny he was thrown from the platform to the legionaries below, who slew him without pity.

At Vetera, some fifteen leagues away, the Vth and XX1st legions, which had been the first to rebel, were still refusing to submit. Germanicus marched at the head of the loyal legions, to reduce them by force, but before taking action he announced his arrival and promised the rebels that he was going to inflict the severest penalties. Then, in the rebels' camp, little groups formed and entered certain tents, where they killed all the legionaries who were regarded as the guiltiest. Hundreds of innocent men perished in this way, victims of personal vengeance, and the massacre went on through the hours of darkness, by torchlight. Wounded soldiers were fleeing through the camp mad with terror, only to be cut down by other soldiers; because people had arrived from every part of the camp to inflict a blind and terrible justice. The sight of blood excited the calmest spirits.

'It was in the very early morning,' continued Lucius Sisenia, 'that I entered the camp of the Vth legion. Torches were still flaring and the muddy roads between the tents were red with blood. Legionaries with drawn swords were coming out of the tents, haggard-eyed and looking enraged or even insane. Others who had been mortally wounded were dragging themselves through the mud, crying out for pardon or seeking the aid of their officers. Some were begging to be killed. Everywhere, even in the middle of the roadways, one saw corpses. Germanicus's horse kept slipping in the blood and mire.

'People don't know what life is, in a legionary camp. You live there from the days of youth to the hour of death, you lose there the best years of your life, killing men or engaged in mutual slaughter. The lot of a galley-slave is not more wretched, I can assure you. We are paid slaves: that is the only difference.

'It was to efface the memory of that fearful night and also to get us away from the encampments, where a further mutiny could always be considered possible, that Germanicus led us out to war; we plunged into the forests beyond the

Rhine, in search of Arminius. After the first encounter the legions commanded by Lucius Estertinius found among the enemy dead the eagles of the XIXth legion which had been lost by Varus in the battle of sad memory that had been fought in this region six years before. Germanicus conceived the plan of performing funeral rites for Varus, his officers and his men on the very spot where they had fallen under the swords of the barbarians. One could still see the trenches, half covered with earth and grass, surrounding the hastily-improvized camp in which the three legions had taken refuge in order to resist to the end. The plain here and there was white with bones, so great had been the number of the slain. Rusty weapons were lying about, and one came upon the skeletons of horses, human skulls placed between the branches of trees, and the remains of altars on which the barbarians had sacrificed the Roman tribunes and other officers. I had beside me a legionary who had escaped from the massacre and who, at every step, pointed out the places where his friends had fallen. We gave burial to the bones, without knowing whether they were those of our men or of the enemy, and erected a tumulus which, some weeks later, was profaned by the soldiers of Arminius.

‘The war was waged with great violence on both sides and lasted for months. Victories followed disasters and so on. I had the impression that it would never end. The country is covered with forests and marshes, and you are always coming upon putrifying corpses and enemies lying in ambush. Dozens of legions would be needed to master that people, one would have to exterminate them to the last child in order to put an end to the war in Germany. We were worn out, terrorized and discouraged. We finally withdrew towards the mouth of the Rhine, and a part of the legions was put on board ship. The rest followed on foot, along the coast, making their way towards Gaul. Germanicus departed with the fleet, leaving the other troops under the command of Publius Vitellius. At the outset everything went as we had foreseen. The coastlands were dry and suitable for marching. But one night a furious wind began to blow, and under the influence of Arcturus the

sea rose and flooded the country far inland. We marched for a whole night, wading blindly onward, with the water up to our necks. Hundreds of men were drowned, while baggage and horses were carried off by the waves. Some of the men lost their bearings in the darkness, and without realizing what they were doing, made for the open sea. My horse saved me, but I myself went nearly mad with fear or fatigue, or through wandering in this chaos. I could remember nothing and for two months I did little but shout out orders or fall off my horse. I could see only the waters and the forest which were in league to destroy me. I struggled with the waves as I made my way beneath giant trees from under whose shelter the soldiers of Arminius were firing arrows at me. To escape them, I would plunge under water, and then, unable to breathe, come to the surface, only to find myself once more among trees full of enemies who took me as the one target for their shafts. Then I plunged in again. Finally, I was told afterwards, I fell into a calm sleep that lasted three days running. When I awoke I remembered everything and was myself once more. They gave me double pay by way of compensation, and I was sent to Troesmis where life, it seems, is quieter and the people less cruel.

'I came by way of Rome. You would not recognize the place. People are reading, secretly of course, lampoons on Tiberius, which speak of his cruelty and pride, the insults which he bandies with old Livia, and also the death of Julia whom he caused to die of hunger in her miserable exile. The law of *lèse-majesté*, enacted by Augustus, hangs like a sword of Damocles over people's heads. A mere denunciation is enough to send you to prison or into exile. Love and friendship are dead.'

He fell silent, fatigued and a little disappointed with himself: because he had not come to tell me about the campaign in Germany, but to ask me questions. I had been sure from the outset that this soldier who had read my books wanted something from me. Advice, perhaps. But in the meantime I was more moved than he.

'I was telling you,' he continued, 'that camp life is very

hard. You have little leisure. You see only your fellow-officers who may become your enemies or even executioners. And then, on reaching the rank of centurion, you have no more friends. I have never known love. I imagined what it was like from reading your books. Is the reality different?’

‘Yes, very different. Love, in the present age, is forbidden to the Romans. It is possible only in a free society where no threat hangs over men and women, in a society guaranteed against lying and fear and the practice of conformity. One evening near Rome, Corinna said to me that she did not love me. And I had written whole books on what I supposed to be love—and the love of Corinna. And that evening I realized in my own mind that I did not love her and never had done. I had been able to sing of her parrot and her dresses, her headaches and caprices, but of her soul I had never said a word. Do you understand? Augustus has given us an empire and has taken away our souls. Without the soul, no love is possible. I should not like to give you pain; but you asked me a question and I don’t want to deceive you. The time is near when our souls will be restored to us. I learned that here, on the frontiers of the free world. You will learn it, at Troesmis perhaps, and then you will have friends and you will know what love is. I have suffered a great deal in my life. The mere thought of being forced to live here among the barbarians, after living in Rome, drove me mad with rage: I used to dream of Corinna and all that Rome had given me. But it was a sham rage and a sham suffering, as artificial as the love and happiness I had sung of in my youth. Now in the space of a few years a Dacian woman has revealed more truths to me than all the women in Rome. She never belonged to me. I never spoke to her of my love, but in her presence I was able to judge myself sincerely. I am rather like you, my friend. I have known love only through my books, and even that was not love. The woman I have spoken of has left; she is now far away from Tomis and will never return. But her presence with me in this house has filled me with understanding. She gave me a glimpse of a time in the future when love will be possible, even for us Romans who are now deprived of it. You are young and will

live on into that time. I am old but I have not lost hope.'

'All this is very difficult for me,' he replied. 'I understand, if I may so express it, what love is not. Your union with Corinna was not love. But how can I accept this judgment without denying your books? I am able to accept it, if this is how you judge the thing. But in that case you have not told me what love is. Is it a secret?'

'No, it is not a secret, but I am not really able to explain it, and I should not be capable even of writing about it. An *Art of Love*, following what I feel at this moment, is no longer possible. We need new words, a new vision of life and a new religion in order to make it possible to invent a new language and express what the men of today are experiencing in their hearts, but which their ignorance prevents them from expressing in words and judgments. I have written of love as it was in a dying world. Poets are now awaiting the news of the birth of God in order to write about a time which will be the era of love.'

He looked at me in amazement. He had not been expecting prophecies; and perhaps he did not even want any because, despite his past sufferings, he was content enough with his lapses from continence. But I was his poet and he had come to hear me.

'And you think that a new god will appear on Olympus? Has he already been born? And do you know anything of it?'

'Yes. He has been born.'

'Where?'

'In exile.'

And I told him what I knew. Everything in the world will have to be renewed.

* * *

The dream I once had in Mucaporus's fishing-boat, the dream of the small fish that was leading me towards the luminous shadows, often haunts me before I fall asleep at night. I have never been able to interpret it. The outline I saw ahead of me

is perhaps that of God Who is light and Who assumes the form of a shadow, that is of a human body, in order to manifest Himself to men. But the fish. . . . Why a fish? What is the meaning of this symbol?

I think that the dreams we have belong to us only in part, but that they would have been clear and intelligible to beings who preceded us and that other beings who come after us will have no difficulty in understanding the same dreams which will visit them, in their turn. So with the dream of the fish.

* * *

Fabia writes: 'For the present there is no hope. Tiberius refuses to see me. For months past I have been forbidden to enter the palace. I don't want to discourage you. . . .' In short, she will take further steps as soon as the present situation changes. But why should I indulge in illusions? Do I still need them? Fabia is further from my thoughts than my mother seems to be when I dream of her.

EIGHTH YEAR



His hands have grown larger and his long hair is sprinkled with grey. As before, he smells of horses and fresh cheese. Comozous is in my presence and I can scarcely believe it.

He covered the ground between Troesmis and Histria in a wagon, following the course of the Danube by way of Arrubium and Carsium, and he came on foot from Histria to Tomis. He is not tired. He entered the city with a company of his compatriots, peasants from the neighbourhood who were coming to the fair; and he has called on me at nightfall so as not to awaken suspicion. He brings me messages from Flavius Capito, to whom I had written from Histria four years ago. Sedida has had built for herself a fine house beside Scorys's; and one of the latter's daughters, the smallest one, has gone to live with her and keep her company. She sends me greetings. 'Yes, she has aged a good deal, her life here below has no meaning now, and she is praying to Zamolxis to call her to himself, where she will find those whom she has lost.' Comozous tells me that the old couple—those who had reminded me of the story of Philemon and Baucis—had in fact been killed by the Sarmatians, and that their son, on his return from the war, had found their bodies hidden under the ashes and had given them burial in the forest. He had rebuilt the house, had married a girl from Zousidava and they already had two sons. 'Oh, yes, you must have spent a fearful night there alone in the wood, with the Sarmatians prowling all round. You were lucky with that horse—do you remember?—the horse that broke his halter and went in pursuit of me. Otherwise his neighing would have betrayed you and

you would have had the same fate as the old couple.'

It was true. I had not thought of that possibility. My life had depended on a horse. If he had not succeeded in breaking the rope that tethered him, my bones would now be lying with those of Philemon and Baucis in the heart of the Dacian forest.

Honorius and his family had not remained long with Scorys. They had moved eastward, where the earth is more fertile, in forest-country of course; not in the direction of the mountains, but towards the plains where other Romans had decided to live.

'It must be admitted,' said Comozous, 'you know how to cultivate the soil and then—yes, you were right—your peasants speak Latin among themselves. I heard them with my own ears while I was there, on Flavius Capito's lands, where Honorius and Dokia have settled. With old Dyzzacus, yes, and the little girl. I took them there myself. It was more than a day's journey in a wagon, oh yes, more than a day. We went downstream as far as Zousidava, where Honorius bought a number of things, and we then took the road towards the sunrise, skirting the southern fringes of the forest. You ought to see Flavius Capito's village, the houses he has built, the stables, too, and the way he sets about tilling the soil. The Dacians who live there quickly grasped the method and they now grow corn higher than you are tall, with well filled ears as big as sparrows. The stalks sway heavily in the breeze as if they were asking man to deliver them from the burden. It's a splendid sight. We breed horses better than you do, but as for tillage it must be admitted that you do it better. You call a *dava* a *vicus*, oh yes, I have learned some Latin words. You should see the children who have been born in Flavius Capito's *vicus*. At the beginning I found it hard to understand them, because they mix Dacian and Latin words until they have invented a new secret language which they use among themselves when they want to keep a secret from their parents. They are little devils who know more about the world than you and I do. Yes, I took part in the siege and later in the defence of Troesmis, but I should prefer not to speak of it.

One of Scorys's sons died there. He was defending himself in a house that was set on fire by the assailants. People were fighting in the streets. That was the end. I managed to escape, but Scorys's son perished in the flames.'

Comozous has lain down in the bed where Dokia used to pass the night when I needed her to look after me. He is already asleep: he will leave tomorrow. I am now reading the letters he has just brought me.

Flavius Capito writes: 'I received the letter you wrote four years ago and I answered you a few months later, once the farm-work was finished. But Dokia tells me that this letter never reached you and I am very sorry indeed, because you have certainly formed a low opinion of me. I was born at Perugia [Corinna's home-town] but I spent my early life in Rome, where I studied and where, one day, I attended the performance of your *Medea*. I even saw you from a distance. You were very young. I liked your play very much. Now if I am not mistaken, you are my senior by five or six years. I shall soon be fifty, but I have retained my bodily strength and I work hard. I must tell you that agriculture has never been my strong point. My father owned estates in Umbria and what I know I learned by strolling through the fields in summer and talking with the peasants. That sort of thing was in my blood, because my father was of peasant ancestry, and to till the ground was the first thing that tempted me when I came here. In Italy I saw nature through the eyes of Virgil and Horace, and love through your *Ars amatoria*. I dreamed of marrying Corinna and taking her into the country. I did my military service in Pannonia, in the IXth legion. There, I took part in many reprisals against the native tribes and I was wounded in one of those encounters. For years my life had been wholly occupied with military duties and I had forgotten the use of my mind. But a long convalescence obliged me to withdraw little by little into myself and to face the problem of my future. The days I had passed in Umbria and the books I had read as a young man haunted my memory. Military life was not an ideal for me. The true life was the one people led outside the camp, in places where everyone was free to

follow his destiny, to devote himself to his work, any work, provided that it was in harmony with the small talent with which nature has endowed each of us. I was not made for war. The thought that for twenty more years I should have to carry out orders, kill men, take part in drill, walk in step, carry standards and live among armed men, began to disquiet me. The best years of my life would be passed in the monotony of this routine. I decided to escape, I didn't know where, but once my mind was made up I began to think of ways and means. I had no difficulty, however, in discovering the only possible way. I had often heard of the Dacian country and its natural wealth, the beauty of the women and the cult of Zamolxis. Like most of my comrades I was an unbeliever and it was not the idea of the one God that settled the question, but rather the notion of an art of love applied to a new feminine ideal. Harassed by desire in my lonely convalescence, I imagined myself winning Dacian women according to the tactics in your book. Who, in that distant land where women must be rather simple-minded, could have resisted those tactics? So I escaped. Avoiding the roads and travelling only by night, I made my way ever eastward across the plains of Pannonia. On reaching the mountains, however, I took the road to Sarmiseguza, Burebista's ancient capital, where I had to appear before the king. I was asked questions, but that was all. Other Romans were there, serving in the army, and I was immediately offered an important position; but I did not accept. It was not what I was looking for. They left me free to choose. For a whole year I worked on a farm not far from the capital, and it was during that time that I discovered my bent. I liked tilling the soil, but I wanted my own land. So I left the farm and made for the eastern part of the country where, after crossing other mountains, I was lucky enough, so I am told, to discover fertile lands which had no owners. One evening I came upon a little village hidden in a forest near a stream called the Tiarantos, and here I remained. In a few years I transformed that remote village into a part of the civilized world. I married a Dacian girl, founded a family, cleared the forest and sowed corn. After a few more years I

discovered something that I had not yet had the time to think of: I was happy, and this happiness came from the earth which my hands had caused to yield its fruits. Other fugitives came and joined me. Such men were to be found everywhere in Dacia. Their problem was often more complicated than mine. It must be admitted that I am not the best qualified person to speak of them or of the religious crisis that was troubling them. I worship Zamolxis, but it was not he that I was in search of. The earth is too much with me and I have little time to devote to Heaven. And then I belong to a generation which was unaware of religious problems: we used to speak of the gods only when we could slip into the conversation a couplet from your *Metamorphoses*. The younger men on the other hand, the recent arrivals who were by far the more numerous, have been coming to Dacia in search of another Heaven, as they are in the habit of saying. They build Roman temples in which they worship Zamolxis. Some of them, it is true, do not change their religion. They remain faithful to the Roman gods, simply adding Zamolxis to the Capitoline Olympus. They aspire in this way to renew and purify our ancient cult, and they say that Rome is a thoroughly corrupt city, which the gods are going soon to punish, and that they themselves have come to Dacia to escape Jupiter's fury. It is even said that a new god will be born on this earth, among the Dacians, or else that this god has already been born somewhere. I cannot imagine such a thing. What can he say to men that is new? Haven't we enough gods whom we have been taught to worship? Please tell me if these rumours have any foundation.'

He ends with these words: 'Your friends often think of you. They are at present building a small house which they hope you will soon occupy. As head of this community I bid you welcome at any time.'

Scorys writes as follows: 'The Dacian priest whom you knew died early this year at the age of eighty-three. I often went to see him. He used to speak of you and to pray to Zamolxis that you might be spared sorrow and home-sickness. I am told that Tiberius shows no more understanding of your

case than Augustus, and that there is no hope at present of a speedy return from exile. If the desire to dwell at liberty should replace in your heart any hope of returning to Rome, do not hesitate to return by the road to the Salt-Water Stream. We should be glad to have you with us. Should the poverty of our barbarous land seem no harder to bear than confinement in Tomis, come to us. In the house I have had built for Sedida there is a large room for you, very warm in winter and cool in summer. I have heard that the legions have mutinied in Pannonia and Germany, and that Tiberius's Empire is less secure than Augustus's. In Rome they will have no time to devote to persons who like you are awaiting clemency. If your countrymen are forgetting you, we are not.'

Honorius gives me news of his family. Dokia is expecting her second child in the Kalends of December. They have a fine house, large and quite new. Honorius has killed a bear whose skin will cover my bed in the house they are now building for me. 'A big stove will protect you from the rigours of winter. Little Dokia will bring you supper every evening, if the cold or rain prevent you from dining with us. Comozeus has made all preparations to transport you safe and sound to our village where, like me, you will find a new homeland and the friendship of all of us. Distrust Valerius.'

I have only to choose between the hospitality of Scorys and that of Honorius. My life is in danger at Tomis, because Valerius will get rid of me at the first sign of disobedience or rebellion. The punishment of political offences is now part of the imperial system. Agrippa Postumus was assassinated, as were Julia and all those whom Livia or Tiberius regard as enemies of the government. So, since there is no immediate prospect of returning to Rome, I have no choice. I shall go with Comozeus. It is never too late, and I am already accustomed to travel. I have now few more years to live and it will be good to pass them amid friendly smiles, in a forest which the centurions have not yet penetrated.

I am laying aside this journal for I know not how long. I shall continue it after I get there.

*

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He has not changed. Eternal life leaves no trace on the countenance, it exists beyond and outside Time which causes us to die. My brother is there, in front of me, just as he was thirty years ago in Rome. He is speaking to me, I can understand him, but it is impossible for me to transcribe his words. It is as though he were addressing some very deep and secret part of my being, some region of consciousness from which the words that have entered cannot come out again. No, it is not an hallucination and this is not his first visit. He vanishes as soon as someone comes into the room, and reappears as soon as I am alone. He smiles at me. I remind him, aloud, of scenes of our childhood, scenes of which I recall the most insignificant details with surprising clarity. He too has forgotten nothing and he lets me speak without interruption, as if all these memories, rendered vivid by my words, gave him immense pleasure. The afternoon in the orchard at Sulmo, the grapes and figs, the women bathing in the stream; his emotional crisis and how he ran away in despair that day when I told him that the gods were dead; then his first love affair in Rome, his years of study, our nocturnal meetings in the taverns beyond the Tiber, our first visit together to the isle of Planasia, his sickness and unexpected death while still young—I can see that all this greatly amuses him. Does he regret the time he spent among the living, or is he smiling simply to please me? He has the same appearance but his language is different. He is part of another world in which nothing that is familiar or comprehensible in this world has any value or meaning. I fully realize this. I make him speak. He answers. What he tells me causes me to smile with hope and joy, but how can I reproduce in words what he says? Communication is possible owing to his outward appearance, otherwise he could not reveal himself to me; but this appearance belongs to the past, to the realm of death, and what he really is now makes no impression on my mortal senses. The contact between us is effected through the medium of what is eternal and invisible in both of us, something which my body hides in an unknown and inaccessible part of itself, like a seed that awaits liberation from the perishable heart of a ripe fruit.

I know, for example, that Theodore is dead—that is what has prevented his writing—but it is not through words that I have learned it. I want to say to him: 'Take me with you more quickly.' But my body is afraid of dying, and I shut my eyes in order to live, in order to banish the image of my brother and to be alone again amid all the pains of my body and the sorrows of my heart, desperate and yet clinging to the desire to survive even in misfortune, to survive at any cost. The struggle between body and soul, between time and eternity, is the most painful thing in this last period of my old age, and it is a struggle waged on the very threshold of death, where I am torn betwixt fear and hope. I know that in the last hour my brother will be at my side, and will guide me. But until then, I am afraid.

* * *

Many months have elapsed since the night I spent reading my friends' letters, while Comozous slept nearby. Once my decision was taken, I planned my flight, but this was not easy to carry out, because I had been forbidden to leave Tomis and I did not wish to ask any favour of Valerius. I summoned Lydia and told her of my intention to lay flowers on Herimon's tomb. This lies in the cemetery outside the city walls, and therefore on forbidden land. I requested Lydia to seek the centurion's permission on my behalf, and this she obtained the same day. She offered to accompany me, but when I said I preferred to be alone she did not insist.

I met Comozous at noon, and he took with him a small chest in which I placed this journal and the few things I judged strictly necessary. But it was a joy to discover that none of my present possessions would be useful in the future because I should find everything I needed in my new home. However, I took Corinna's *focale* which I wished to give to Dokia, and I abandoned the house in which I had passed the seven years of my exile as if I were merely going for a walk through the town. The weather was good. October was mild and sunny, and a scent of must and of grapes being crushed

somewhere by children's hands floated through the air, and made me think of the orchard at Sulmo and of my visions. I had not, up to that time, been visited by the hallucinations of which I have spoken above. My brother had appeared to me only in dreams or when some external sign brought him back to the borderline of memory. I did not wish to think of death, least of all on this day when I was leaving Tomis to enter on a new stage in my life, far from the chains which the Empire had thrown round my neck.

Comozous was awaiting me in the cemetery, with an ass he had bought for me; and we immediately made for the sea, following the road I had taken with Dokia when I went to Mucaporus's cottage. I hoisted myself with some difficulty on to the animal, but had soon to dismount because my body, weakened by old age and lack of exercise, was unable to bear the jolts. The going became more and more painful until at last we were making virtually no progress. I lay down discouraged in the shade of some acacias, beside the tombstone on which I read the well-known words: 'Have confidence.' We had planned to pass the night at Mucaporus's. A fishing-boat would have taken us on to Histria, whence, thanks to Dionisodor's assistance, we should have pursued the journey to Troesmis in a larger vessel. Once there, a wagon and two good horses would have been purchased. But I was at the end of my strength and night was near. A quick decision had to be taken. We agreed then to separate, as formerly; Comozous was to return after nightfall with Mucaporus, to help me on. So I lay down among the trees on grass still warm from the autumnal heat. A hundred yards away, beyond the cliff-top, I could see the blue wall of the sea and many gulls in flight, engaged in fishing. The breeze brought to me the sound of waves, the smell of seaweed and the hoarse mewing of the birds. I thought of my future. I was intending to arrange with Dionisodor for Fabia's voyage. Yes, she ought to be with me: life in Rome had no meaning for her now. Her daughter had married since my exile, and Fabia herself had no further obligations. We should have spent the last years of our life together, in the quietude of that distant forest which at-

tracted me at this moment more than any possibility of returning to Rome. My legs were hurting me, they felt heavy and swollen, and a kind of numbness was creeping up my back as far as my shoulders and the nape of my neck. I was in a fever. Once with Mucaporus, everything would be all right. But now I was trembling. I was cold and felt very ill. A hacking cough began to shake me.

I could see the sunrays penetrating the woodland and falling full upon the tree-trunks. The acacia-grove had taken on the faded brownish-yellow tints of an autumn twilight; the silence was broken only by the crisp fall of a leaf. The sea was calm now, or else, benumbed with fever, I had ceased to hear it. I kept changing my position, unable to find a comfortable place on the hard ground. How hard and inhospitable the earth can be! My whole body was aching horribly.

The tree-trunks lit by the last rays of the sinking sun reminded me of a similar sunset on the Appian Way. The sun-rays were causing the pine-trunks to glow with a clear pink light that dappled the whole landscape. There was something unreal about it. It seemed as though the light were coming from the trunks themselves and as though the sun were receiving its reflection. Those pines were the source of the light. I was with Corinna. I called to her gently. It was the first time I had called to her in that way since our separation. 'Corinna! Corinna!' The name was in keeping with the sadness of this autumn nightfall.

'Have confidence!' A man lay buried, quite near me, under the hard earth. I dared not breathe or cough. Why had I uttered Corinna's name? A mad fear came over me. I shut my eyes. Then the dry grass rustled with the sound of a step. I gave a start and opened my eyes. My brother was there, leaning against a tree, and the last rays of light went right through his face and body. Through his toga I could see the few trees that separated him from the road, and beyond that, the sea which now looked dark and austere. The seagulls were crying: 'Medeaaa! Medeaaa!' She was going to answer at any moment now. She would appear on the cliff-top to kill her brother—my brother. I was trembling in my whole

body; my teeth were chattering. I was cold, my head ached terribly and I could not master the trembling that shook me as if it came from outside, as if I were a mere branch in the storm. The most urgent thing was to free myself from the company of the dead and to lie down and rest in my room at Tomis. I rose to my feet and took two steps to emerge from the trees and show myself; but then I fell, crying 'Help!' with the last of my strength. I saw Valerius coming along the road with three legionaries, all on horseback. They had been seeking me for hours. I could see the centurion's eyes fixed on me, ironical and malicious, and I lost consciousness.

Now it is winter again. I am in my old bed in Tomis, exhausted with sickness and despair. What happened to Comozeus? I do not know and I shall never risk asking anyone. No doubt he had returned at nightfall, as arranged, and had been unable to understand how I had disappeared. Had he returned to Tomis next day? Had he seen me in the grip of fever and delirium? He had certainly returned home, powerless now in face of destiny's decree.

Snow has been falling abundantly and no sounds reach me where I lie. The fire is going out in the hearth. My fingers have lost the habit of writing. If only I had a dog to talk to, some faithful being at my bedside. Someone has been in today to look after me, to light the fire and arrange the bed. Was it Lydia? Someone, at any rate, who knows my habits and wants me to continue writing.



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